

## Wal-Mart to fill void left by Zellers

Hard on the heels of the news Zellers closes in February, Wal-Mart has announced a new store beside the Swift Current mall.

Construction on the approximately 110,000-square-foot facility, which is substantially larger than its current operation in the Wheatland Mall, is likely to begin mid-year in 2005, said Wal-Mart Canada spokesman Kevin Groh.

"The idea behind the relocation has to do with everything from improved parking, to an improved retail shopping experience, offering a modern facility with a better check out, with better layout and better use of space for everything from displays to making absolutely certain that we have the items in stock customers are coming in for," said Groh Wednesday in a telephone interview from Wal-Mart Canada's headquarters in Mississauga.

Swift Current Mall general manager Annie Narine said she is sympathetic to Zellers workers who will lose their jobs.

But she added that the new Wal-Mart store and a new stand-alone liquor outlet that will be built just behind Boston Pizza and immediately south of the shopping centre are encouraging signs.

"We are saddened that the community support or market support was not there for Zellers to stay in town, but it's business as usual. We believe that opportunities for employment will still be available," Narine said.

"I feel that, on behalf of the landlords, it's an exciting time for Swift Current Mall and the merchants should feel excited because the landlords are reclaiming its position in the marketplace, which includes southwestern Saskatchewan. We're giving the shoppers selection, variety, good pricing and the opportunity to stay and shop in this region."

Groh said the new Wal-Mart will be a stand-alone operation situated on the

current Zellers site, which will be demolished to make way for construction.

In addition to the same general merchandise provided at the current store, plans call for the new operation to have a McDonald's, a tire/lube express auto service, a pharmacy, an optical centre, a one-hour photo development lab and a portrait studio.

While the new Wal-Mart will expand on the line of dry and non-perishable food items sold at the present store with the addition of refrigerated space, Groh said the operation will not be a full-fledged grocery outlet.

The store is expected to open in early 2006.

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