

At least 10 different kinds of olives. Organic Valley milk. Fresh onions, garlic and avocado. Doesn't sound like standard convenience store fare, does it?

Addison's Market is anything but a usual convenience store. Rather, the store's gay owner, Gary Walton, calls it a "purveyor of semi-convenience."

Walton's concept is to provide a wider range of higher-quality products while still maintaining quick in-and-out convenience for neighborhood shoppers. He carries soy milk as well as regular, heat-and-serve polenta and Ginger Aid medicinal tea. The magazine rack displays *Utne*, *eco-structure* and *Hip Mama*.

"In general, I think people are just surprised by what they can find in the store. In 1,200 square feet, you can find a lot of in-between baking needs—obscure items that they don't expect to be able to find," says Walton.

Walton has heard his store referred to as a small New Seasons or Zupan's, but he prefers thinking of it simply as a neighborhood store.

"I just put up a sign: 'We're like a bionic neighborhood store.' That's kind of what I want it to be thought of as," he says.

While he doesn't claim it's an original idea, he doesn't know of anywhere else in the Portland area that has the same mix. He suspects similar shops may serve populations in larger cities, but he hasn't traveled enough to find out for himself.

When Walton originally purchased the corner lot on 45th Avenue and Stark Street, he intended to gut the old convenience store and revamp the building.

A picture on the cash register in Addison's shows the market's previous incarnation: a tired-looking store with cigarette ads everywhere and bars over the windows. Walton recalls that they

## THE NEW CORNER SHOP

Addison's Market offers convenience and quality to the neighborhood

by Rebecca Ragain

sold mostly expired food, 40-ounce bottles of malt liquor and some drug paraphernalia.

But instead of repurposing the building, he found himself inspired to salvage the store. Various aspects of his personal background converged to lead him to this decision.

His experience working at Nature's after college—though it involved little work on the store floor or with food—connected him with business role models, off

whom he later bounced his ideas for the new store.

Walton studied urban planning in college, focusing on urban economics, and has a strong interest in the role of neighborhood businesses.

"What gives people the ability to live within a neighborhood and make as few trips out of it because what they need is here?" he questions.

For these reasons and others, the idea of a neighborhood store appealed to him. In September 2002, he opened Addison's Market.

"So far, so good," he says today. "The neighborhood's been very kind and generous with us."

He finds that being a gay business owner has not been an issue for him.

"There were only a few Yes on 36 lawn signs in the neighborhood, if you know what I mean. It's a very welcoming neighborhood."

As far as open-mindedness goes, it's a two-way street. Walton is responsive to the needs of his customers, open to suggestions and willing to experiment with products.



Gay-owned Addison's is the gourmet's destination on upper Stark Street.

"It's sort of this democratic process in terms of what's on the shelf," he says.

Surprisingly, Walton is not much of a foodie himself. He's more of a Ritz Crackers kind of guy.

So, in addition to input from his customers, he gives his three employees a large chunk of the responsibility, especially store manager Kelly Young, whom he calls "the brains of the operation." He also consults with an independent contractor about product selection.

"I would have picked the absolute wrong products to put on the shelf. Because what do I know?" says Walton. "So the logical thing is to get the best people you can to do the things that you don't do well."

Even though he's comfortable turning over the reins, he still enjoys working in the store. He posts ever-changing signs around the shop with pithy comments like "Superhero-like clerks" and a Full Sail poster that reads, "Ahoy maties."

His time behind the counter also enables him to build relationships with his neighbors. They come in and chat about who's doing what, who has rooms for rent and even who's available.

"I want to do a 'singles shop' night.... You know, bump into somebody over Annie's Mac & Cheese," he says, only partially in jest.

Addison's already hosts one successful social event: a wine tasting the second Friday of every month, featuring soda for kids and sometimes pasta samples. Occasionally other neighborhood businesspeople make guest appearances, giving chair massages or selling hand-crafted hats, for example.

After nearly three years in business, Walton sees his store as "an interesting microcosm."

"It just creates more of a tight-knit community," he says. **jm**

ADDISON'S MARKET is located at 4500 S.E. Stark St.

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