

## Grocery store returns to St. Andrew's Village in December



**By Brock Weir**

Seniors living in Aurora's northwest corner are expected to get an early Christmas present this December with the return of a grocery store to St. Andrew's Village.

Since the plaza's Foodland outlet closed its doors in 2011, area seniors have struggled to find a way to get their groceries, often having to rely on multiple buses, taxis, and lifts from family and friends to literally bring home the bacon. Soon, they will once again have access to fresh groceries within walking distance.

Toronto-based grocer Centra Foods has signed the lease on the former Foodland outlet and is due to begin renovations this week.

"We want to open before Christmas, so we have to work day and night now," says owner Louie Liu. "The schedule is very tight and we are looking into an opening between December 11 and 15. It is better one or two weeks before Christmas, otherwise it will be too busy. This is an exciting opportunity. There is so much demand from the local community."

Looking ahead to the December launch, Mr. Liu says he aims to provide 60 per cent "local" groceries with the remaining 40 per cent tailored to the "ethnic" market. This includes traditional grocery store staples, as well as a hot counter of ready-made Chinese, Indian, Korean and even western cuisine, including those ubiquitous roast chickens.

On a tour of the facility last week with some seniors living in residences across Orchard Heights Drive, Mr. Liu underscored the services they plan on providing to the community, including a grocery delivery service for seniors living nearby, as well as opportunities to whip up that all-important Thanksgiving turkey next fall for their families.

"We have a plan," he says. "If there are big snows, they can order by phone and we can send their orders to them within a certain time. I will do my best to help seniors."

While these "extras" were music to the ears of seniors last week, their uppermost concern right now is simply having a grocery store within walking distance once again.

"I can't wait for this to open because it will be so much easier," said Carol Playter. "You can just go right across the road and you're here. It has been terrible [since Foodland closed] because there are a lot of seniors. All you hear is we don't have a grocery store and then we have to travel by bus because a lot of us just don't drive. What do you do? You have to get a friend or take a cab and it can cost over \$20 to get to a store."

A shuttle service organized by then-MPP Frank Klees with Sobey's on Bayview Avenue in 2011 was only successful for a time, added Ms. Playter.

‘There are lots of people here who don't like making dinner,’ added Joanne Hatley. ‘My sister comes from Don Mills and Sheppard and takes me to Walmart or No Frills or wherever she wants to go. I am very, very happy with this. You can just cross the road. I hope it works out for them because if it doesn't, they will close it.’

Added Carol: ‘I'll be here to bug them every day!’

Helping to make the grocery store happen was Council candidate Arshad Desai, who facilitated talks with Centra and the owners of the plaza, after taking a petition to Orchard Heights neighbours. Now a ‘community liaison’ for the grocer, he says neighbours are ‘very excited and just waiting for it to open.’

‘Residents' feedback was just phenomenal,’ said Mr. Desai. ‘Initially [the petition] was just targeted towards the elderly population across the road, but the further I went down Orchard Heights I understood it is beyond just an age thing, it is part of the local neighbourhood. They are looking for a grocery store that is going to be accessible to them and that is going to be convenient.’

‘From discussing this with local residents and talking to Louie, I think this is a match made in heaven. Louie has told me on numerous occasions that he understands his clientele is going to be from Orchard Heights and Batson. He is not trying to overinflate or over-attract business and, to me, that is exactly what this community needs. I think it is going to be a welcome addition to St. Andrew's Plaza, and I am looking forward to it, especially for local residents.’