

# FILLING THE FRIDGE

Before I moved to Wilmette seven years ago, I used my reporter-researcher instincts to gather the essential facts about the town that was to be my family's new home. The children were enrolled in school and summer camps long before hundreds of cartons were packed up in our suburban New York neighborhood.

But when the overstuffed moving van pulled into our new driveway, my priorities turned primitive: What about food? Which grocery store would deliver on short notice? Where could I buy infant formula at midnight? Who supplies the juiciest strawberries? Most critical of all: Where was the nearest full-scale supermarket?

While the van unloaded, I quickly introduced myself to a neighbor and politely pumped her for the information my hungry family needed.

No doubt about it. There's something comforting about a fully stocked kitchen. You may not be able to locate the Cuisinart among your cooking paraphernalia, but at least the new refrigerator can be filled with the basics after one exploratory excursion to the nearest supermarket. The good news is that supermarkets and specialty food stores are abundant throughout the north and northwest suburbs.

The most logical spot to begin stocking the new pantry is at one of our area's major grocery chains. **Jewel** and **Dominick's** are the largest purveyors, with the most locations. Both chains provide check-cashing cards to customers, and most locations feature Cash Station machines.

About 60 Jewel stores cover the northern Chicago suburbs. Some two-thirds of them are "combos"—that is, connected with full-scale Osco drugstores stocked with health and beauty aids, liquor, general merchandise, and other items that make a new home more livable. The new prototype Jewel store, epitomized by the chain's newest location in Waukegan, is about 65,000 square feet. In addition to the wide variety of fresh meats and the in-store bakeries you'd expect to find, several locations feature a fresh poultry shop stocked with whole dressed rabbits, quartered ducks and whole

quail. Shoppers in Evanston, Wilmette and Kenilworth can take advantage of Jewel's Peapod delivery service if they're equipped with specified computer hardware. (See the "Food Forethought" column on Page 17 of the March '91 issue for a complete rundown on computerized grocery delivery in the area.) Phone 708/864-8900 for more information.

Dominick's locations are just as numerous, with stores in Evanston, Northfield, Northbrook, Arlington Heights, Mount Prospect, Vernon Hills, Round Lake Beach, Schaumburg and many other locations. The standard site covers 30,000 square feet; combination stores—with a far wider variety of general merchandise and health and beauty aids—span up to 75,000 square feet. Look for these units in Lake Zurich, Hoffman Estates, Rolling Meadows, Buffalo Grove and Des Plaines. Dominick's megastores are known as Omni Super Stores. Found in Prospect Heights, Niles, McHenry and Round Lake Beach, these discount food and drugstores are simply mammoth. On the delivery scene, Dominick's is hooked into Prodigy—a computer software program offering a variety of services. Dial 708/515-0890 for more information.

**Cub Foods** is another major player. With stores in Arlington Heights, Mundelein and seven additional suburban locations, Cub bills itself as a super discounter. Savings vary, but expect to spend 10-15 percent less than you would elsewhere.

Somewhat smaller in size than the supermarkets mentioned above, **Eagle Food Centers** are nonetheless full-scale stores. The company recently introduced a delivery service, "Eagle Shopper Express," that allows consumers to order groceries via a 24-hour 800 number. Call 1-800/284-7467 for more information. Eagle has about a dozen north suburban locations, including Lake Zurich, Libertyville, Waukegan and Round Lake Beach.

When you're hungry for more intriguing fare and a sparkling display of specialty and ethnic items, a leisurely drive around the northern landscape will lead to any number of fine neighborhood markets. Two of the most im-

## NEARBY GROCERY STORES

### OFFER A CORNUCOPIA

### OF CHOICES, FROM STAPLES

### TO HEALTH FOODS

### TO EXOTIC FARE

### BY BETSY STORM

pressive are **Sunset Food Mart** stores (1812 Green Bay Road in Highland Park, 1901 Cherry Lane in Northbrook and 825 S. Waukegan Road in Lake Forest) and **Treasure Island Foods** stores (911 Ridge Road in Wilmette, 1409 Waukegan Road in Glenview and 201 Waukegan Road in Lake Bluff).

The loyal clientele perusing the overstocked aisles of these European-style stores sing their praises to anyone who will listen. These retailers combine the best elements of the large and small grocer. In addition to stocking all the ho-hum basics, they win customers with full-service meat counters, exotic produce and excellent service. Treasure Island prides itself on carrying the largest number of imported items of any store in Chicago. Every conceivable nationality is welcome in this melting pot—English, Greek, German, Japanese, Mexican.... Treasure Island's Lake Bluff location hosts Monday evening cooking classes. For just \$5, participants cook the night away with leading local chefs.

An excursion to **Don's Finest Foods**, 850 N. Western Avenue in Lake Forest, is a treat for health-conscious lovers of good food. Besides being a specialty grocery complete with all the delicacies a certified gourmand demands, Don's staff encourages shoppers to sample its no-cholesterol and



low-cholesterol entrees and side dishes. Owner Don Ruffolo and his staff are sticklers for freshness; they make the trek to Chicago's South Water Market for fresh produce three times a week.

"Our Family Serving Your Family" is the motto of Winnetka's **Grand Food Center** at 606 Green Bay Road. The heart of this operation is a full-scale deli and bakery that prepares food the way we wish our mothers had. Homemade soups and prepared entree selections change daily, and many are created with a healthy emphasis. Oversized muffins—cherry yogurt, cranberry and sour poppyseed among the varieties—are among the scratch bakery's stars. Delivery is available every day but Sunday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. for a minimal fee. Payment methods include house charge, Visa, Mastercard and check. **Dee Jay Foods** at 341 Hazel in Glencoe is owned by the same folks; expect the same caliber of quality there.

"Our goal is to make the consumer's shopping experience as painless as possible," explains Gene Smith, owner of **Lakeside Foods** at 800 Elm St. in Winnetka. Smith accomplishes his mission by providing small services that make a big difference. The staff unloads carts for the customer and delivers the bags to the car. The

market supplies only prime and choice cuts of meat and poultry.

And now for the superspecialists, those merchants who entice homemakers with the grocery items nearest and dearest to their menu-planning needs or areas of culinary expertise. There are too many to mention here, so we'll whet your appetite with just a handful of merchants who represent the cream of the crop.

**The Oak Street Market**, 1615 Oak Avenue in Evanston, is a must-see for anyone dedicated to healthy, organic and natural foods. "We read the ingredients label on everything before we decide whether to stock it," explains Oak Street manager Dave Goetz. The market is dedicated to brand names any health devotee recognizes—Eden Foods, Little Bear, Hain and Barbara's, for example. Meat and poultry are free of antibiotics and hormones. Close to one-third of the produce selection is organic; no pesticides or chemical fertilizers are used in growing them. Prepared entrees and soups are carefully created with the same superior products. The store emanates a laid-back aura that combines a 1960s spirit with a New Age attitude. Delivery isn't available, but

this market is well worth a personal visit between the hours of 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. seven days a week.

Your meat and fish needs can be handily filled at dozens of locations. A prime choice for meat is **Elegance 'N Meats** at 3135 Dundee Road in Northbrook. This immaculate shop was named best butcher by North Shore magazine in 1990. Those who know their snapper, shrimp and swordfish often head for **Johnsen's Seafoods of Winnetka** at 805 Elm St.

Feel like dishing up some authentic fajitas? A trip to **La Mexicana** at 765 W. Dundee in Wheeling satisfies those south-of-the-border cravings with arachera, the beef that will really make your fajitas sizzle. A full line of Mexican cheeses, including chihuahua, quesadilla and banele, can be purchased here. The wide variety of chiles is guaranteed to wake up your nasal passages. A small selection of prepared dishes is available for takeout.

As the name suggests, 75 percent of what nestles on the shelves at **Carrot Top** at 1430 Paddock Drive in Northbrook is fruits and vegetables. Several varieties of baby lettuce are available, as are edible flowers, including pansies and marigolds. Since 1976, owner Jim Corrigan has been supplying customers with the exotic natural offerings he's encountered in trips around the globe. These include star fruit, cherimoya and lemon grass. At holiday time, truffles make their way to Corrigan's store from Europe.

They call themselves suppliers of bulk foods, but that doesn't begin to describe the food extravaganza that is the **Home Economist**—locations include Skokie, Des Plaines, Arlington Heights and Barrington. If one requires just a pinch of saffron, the world's most expensive spice, this is the place to head. "We cater to the sophisticated cook," notes purchasing agent Angela McEntee. Hundreds of bins overflow with everything from rye flour to salt- and sugar-free candy and snacks. The chain roasts its own coffees. Several locations carry as many as 200 cheeses, pates and dips. The Home Economist is a self-service operation—not only does that save money, it makes shopping here a learning experience. **N**