

## Supermarkets whet customer appetites with cafes

STERLING, Va. (AP) — At a sidewalk cafe by a suburban parking lot, Dwight Littlefield planned a client meeting and wondered what his wife would want him to pick up at the supermarket.

It was natural for him to think about both because the cafe was at the supermarket. It also was good for the grocery, a branch of the Rochester, N.Y.-based Wegmans chain.

From coffee bars to full-meal dining, cafes are opening in food stores, which expect eaters and drinkers to turn into shoppers — and vice versa.

“I’ll probably pick up some danishes or fruit,” said Littlefield, a senior tax consulting manager at the PricewaterhouseCoopers accounting firm’s Washington office.

That is not uncommon, said Wegmans’ regional executive chef John Emerson, who oversees prepared food.natural and organic foods chain opens larger stores, it makes more room for these areas, she said.

The Sterling store can seat about 250 people. Some who came for a bite may leave with a shopping bag. “They may see an impulse item they can’t resist,” Emerson said.

Or they might return for groceries, which was Littlefield’s plan for after work.

The market’s bread and butter is the consumer who comes to fill up the shopping cart but also have a cappuccino and bagel, Emerson said.

Emerson, the Wegmans’ chef, prefers to keep the recipes for his cafe products separate from the recipes he suggests for grocery shoppers.

The Sterling store has cooking demonstration islands featuring recipes geared for home kitchens. The equipment Emerson’s staff uses to prepare cafe meals is more complex, using “a combination of convection, dry heat and steam heat, with pressure, without pressure, and lots of things like that,” he said. “Most people can’t afford \$20,000 ovens for their home.”

But they can try the ingredients. “I am without question the biggest customer in the store,” Emerson said. “I spend tens of thousands of dollars a week buying food from other departments.”



The trend toward eat-in supermarket cafes is growing, said Arlene Spiegel, a restaurant and food industry consultant in New York City.

A cafe can save a trip to a restaurant and also hold the customer in the store, which can increase business for the grocery.

“When you keep people in the facility longer, they tend to buy more,” Spiegel said.

The cafe gives supermarkets a chance to polish their image — “their particular culinary point of view and style,” Spiegel said. “You can’t do that at a deli counter.”

The difference between looking like a cafe or an outgrowth of the deli counter is important for the cafe’s success. Spiegel said the cafe should have its own identity, including its own logo and entrance.

“People have to believe you are not just using the deli workers to make this food,” she said.

Whole Foods Markets have eating areas in most of their 152 U.S. stores. Many customers who buy the store’s prepared foods never get their purchases as far as the front door, said spokeswoman Kate Lowery. As the natural and organic foods chain opens larger stores, it makes more room for these areas, she said.

As people eat where ingredients are sold, they might think about fixing the meal themselves, at home. Whole Foods has put together a cookbook of requested recipes, Lowery said.