

# DeMarrais: Why small supermarkets see an edge

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Big is often better, at least when it came to supermarkets.

But no more. Small stores are popping up around North Jersey, offering shoppers most of what they buy in the big stores in less than half the space. In the last year we have seen two national chains — Aldi and The Fresh Market — set up shop in the area, and a third — Bravo — opened its first [Bergen County](#) store two weeks ago.

And more could be coming.

"Smaller-size supermarkets are a big trend across the country right now," said John Hauptman, a partner in Willard Bishop Consulting, an Illinois-based retail advisory company.

From the chains' standpoint, it's a way to build a store that will generate a quick return on investment and to locate in areas where they wouldn't otherwise be able to, especially in areas such as Bergen and [Passaic](#) counties, where large pieces of real estate are hard to come by, Hauptman said.

It's targeted marketing by grocery retailers, said Brian Todd, senior vice president at The Food Institute in [Upper Saddle River](#).

"They see a niche they can fill," he said. "Smaller chains are targeting the demographics. They're not there trying to compete with the larger supermarkets."

But they can complement them, said Cesar Sabay of [Englewood](#). He does most of his shopping at ShopRite, and buys bulk items at the BJ's Wholesale Club. The new Bravo provides a convenient alternative, he said.

"I don't think this is going to replace ShopRite; this is for getting something quickly," he said.

Bravo is similar in size to Aldi, which came to [Clifton](#) in January, and The Fresh Market, which opened in [Montvale](#) in June.



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Bravo, a smaller-sized supermarket chain, opened its first Bergen County store two weeks ago in a 13,000-square-foot building that was a former Walgreens in Teaneck.



Each is under 20,000 square feet, but their format and emphasis are dramatically different.

Bravo is the most like a typical supermarket, combining major national brands with private label or second-tier brands (in Bravo's case, it's Krasdale).

Aldi, a Germany-based chain, has more than 1,100 stores in the United States. It has grown quickly selling primarily private label products at low prices. It has another store scheduled to open in [East Rutherford](#) this fall.

The Fresh Market is a North Carolina-based chain of smaller-sized supermarkets specializing in fresh produce and other perishables. It targets upscale customers.

"Supermarkets are always pushing the boundaries of what its format should be," Hauptman said.

For the past 10 to 15 years, that meant larger and larger stores, but that has reversed in the past two to three years with stores in the 20,000-square-foot range, he said. Some chains are experimenting with even smaller convenience-store formats in the 2,000- to 3,000-square-foot range.

"It's not just here," Todd said. "Even Wal-Mart has come out with their little neighborhood format."

By comparison, the typical suburban supermarket averages 50,000 to 60,000 square feet, and some of the megastores are more than 100,000 square feet.

Bravo opened on Cedar Lane, [Teaneck](#)'s main business street, in what, ironically, was a supermarket that shut more than 20 years ago because, at about 13,000 square feet, it was too small.

The property was converted to a Walgreens — one of five [Teaneck](#) supermarkets that became drug stores in the past 30 years — but it is again a supermarket.

At the new store, space limits selection, but a shopper can find most items on a shopping list.

The store has a colorful, fresh produce department — and little is prepackaged. In addition, it has a butcher, fresh seafood and a small deli department.

In short, it's a full-service supermarket with competitive prices.

I use the term "competitive" to mean some everyday prices seem to be a bit higher than at the major supermarket chains, but its weekly sales are at least as good as you'll find elsewhere. That makes it a convenient alternative to [Teaneck](#)'s only other supermarket, a Stop & Shop less than a mile away, and stores in neighboring towns.

The new store also is likely to appeal to the large and growing South American and Caribbean populations in [Teaneck](#) and surrounding communities, said Sandra Jaquez, who owns the new store with her husband, Jose.

Even so, they are attempting to appeal to a wider audience. Bravo stores are individually owned — much like ShopRite and Foodtown — and owners have the flexibility to carry products that might have appeal in their specific markets, such as kosher and organic foods in the new [Teaneck](#) Bravo.

"We don't want people to think we serve only one group," Jaquez said. "We cater to everyone."

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