

# Archives

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## Bagging a bargain

For Parmajit and Sukhwinder Benipal, their grocery store, Beni's Discount Grocery Outlet on Gettysburg Road in Upper Allen Twp., is their piece of the American dream. Emigrants from India more than 20 years ago, the couple started small and worked hard, running a convenience store in Lancaster.

However, as their children, Bikramjit, 14, and Arashdeep, 12, got older, they began asking when they would be able to help their father.

With the economy in free-fall, it was a tough choice to start a business, but Paramjit said he saw an opportunity in the discount grocery business.

"I wanted to open a store like this, with very cheap prices," Benipal said.

"I wanted to help the people buy" what they needed, he said.

Now, he said, he has a store in a nice neighborhood, where his children can help stock shelves and bag groceries alongside their parents.

Discount grocery stores are able to offer lower prices because they acquire closeouts from manufacturers.

In much the same way deeply discounted home goods are available from Ollie's or half-price fashion from T.J. Maxx, grocery outlets give food, snack and beauty product manufacturers a way to get rid of excess or close-to-expiration product.

Something as simple as a package change or holiday design on a cereal box can send it to a re-seller. The re-sellers, in turn, offer that name-brand product at 10 percent to more than 70 percent off the original price.

Pennsylvania? where food is still, for the most part, untaxed? seems to draw discount grocers, said Bob Gorland of Matthew P. Casey and Associates, a supermarket and pharmacy consultant in Harrisburg.

The phenomenon started about 20 or 30 years ago, with groups of Amish opening discount stores.

Eventually, more people entered the market, he said, acquiring less-expensive real estate? say, a former drug store or auto parts store? and opening up much more cheaply than a traditional store.

The upside, Gorland said, is that shoppers can find inexpensive goods without having to buy in bulk warehouse- shopping-club style.

The downside is that consumers must be careful because "low price without product integrity means nothing," he said.

Some discounters hold to one location in one area, he said. Others branch out.

Dennis Sharp founded Sharp Shopper in 1988 with his wife, Bonnie. They began in Ephrata and have expanded to Virginia and other areas of Pennsylvania.

Business has been vigorous since the economic downturn began in 2008, Dennis Sharp said.

While that's good for him, he said he's equally glad to be there for customers.

Two weeks ago, "I was at one of our stores and someone came up to me and said her husband's been laid off for months," Sharp said. "She wanted to thank us for being there, because she said it was a lifeline."

Sharp Shopper and Amelia's Grocery Outlet, another Pennsylvania-based chain, only deal in closeouts and overstocks.

Bent-and-dents are another reason grocers discount products. These stores also sell close-outs and bulk goods, but their primary trade is in damaged-package items at steep discount.

Boxes can be scrunched in transit or a stack of canned goods can be knocked over in the warehouse. Instead of tossing them, manufacturers sell them to discount stores.

Pennsylvania requires grocers who want to deal in bend-and-dent items to have a license.

Beni's has a license, Sukhwinder Benipal said, but has so far only acquired closeout merchandise.

Adding those goods is one of many plans the Benipals have for their store.

In the coming months, Paramjit said, he'd like to add a fresh deli counter, lottery tickets and an increasing mix of merchandise.

"This country has a lot of opportunity if you work hard," Paramjit said.

"If you work hard, you can have everything you want."

INFOBOX:

Shopping at discount groceries

Be flexible. Resellers might not have the same products every time. Be ready to take home Joy instead of Palmolive, or Suave instead of Pantene.

Avoid any products that are out of date. Most resellers won't sell these, but occasionally they are marked at a deep discount for quick sale.

Avoid dented cans or jars of food that have their freshness seals popped. Make sure the product inside a dented or crumpled box has retained its original interior packaging.

Avoid boxes with interior packaging that has been taped back together.

Know your shopping and consumption habits. Purchasing foods or soft drinks that disappear quickly in your home might be a savings, as long as the product's integrity is comparable to first-quality items.

Some of your best bets might be items with no expiration date, such as plastic bags, laundry detergent, soap, paper towels, toilet paper, paper plates and napkins.

Many of these stores sell first-quality items, such as milk, cheese and eggs, so check to make sure those prices are competitive or less than what you'd find at a regular grocery store.

Source: Bob Gorland, Matthew P. Casey and Associates.

Midstate discounters

WEST SHORE ? BB's Grocery Outlet, 20 Quigley Road, Newburg.

Amish- run. Cash or check only.

Beni's Discount Grocery Outlet, 2317 Gettysburg Road, Lower Allen Twp. Cash, check, charge.

Amelia's Grocery Outlet, 105 Gateway Square, Hampden Twp. Cash, check, debit. No credit cards.

EAST SHORE

Sharp Shopper, 1595 Jamesway Plaza, Middletown. Cash, check, charge.

Amelia's Grocery Outlet, 600 North Mountain Road, Lower Paxton Twp. Cash, check, debit.

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**Section:** Money

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