

CALLING ALL SHOPPERS

GROCERY OUTLET



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Grocery Outlet Vice President Jon Wylie thanks the store's customers and supporters.

Customer support helps to keep Grocery Outlet open

By DAVID PACINI

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FELTON — At least 100 customers of the Grocery Outlet here cheered Thursday as its parent company announced the store will stay open.

Shoppers gathered at the store parking lot at the invitation of Grocery Outlet officials.

"While the store lease was going to be up in August, we have renewed the lease," Jon Wylie, Grocery Outlet's vice president of marketing, said. "We were amazed and overwhelmed with the interest here."

That interest was piqued last month when corporate officials at Berkeley-based Canned Foods said they did not plan to renew the store's lease, in part because of a raise in the lease for the building, which is owned by a Santa Cruz couple.

Wylie said the outpouring customer support translated into a jump in sales, making the store at 6123 Highway 9 profitable enough to stay open and prompting officials to sign a 30-month lease.

When the second lane of Highway 9 between Felton and Santa Cruz opens, store owners hope customer traffic will increase more.

"We'll evaluate again at the time that the lease is up," Wylie said.

Many in the crowd were senior citizens, and a number of them told Wylie they depended on the store's discount prices to accommodate their limited shopping budgets.

Carmine Costanzo, 95, shopped for



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Carmine Costanzo, 95, seeks out Grocery Outlet bargains.

groceries with his son-in-law Gary Rush Thursday.

Rush said, "I've got to shop here. I've got \$1,500 a month to shop and support my family and everything."

The grocery store chain buys excess production from wholesalers and seeks promotional deals and cut-rate prices on merchandise that has undergone packaging changes.

Shoppers also praised the store's bright and colorful atmosphere, good service and upbeat music.

"It's so much fun here," said Patricia Depalo, as she hugged and thanked a teary Carmen Collins, who operates the store with her husband, Rob. "We dance down the aisles, espe-

cially now that we know it's going to stay open. It's important to people who live on limited incomes."

Rob Collins is well-known in the community for having coached the San Lorenzo Valley girls cross country team to two state championships. A trophy showcase in the front of the store holds a number of trophies and framed newspaper articles on the team's success.

"We're getting ready to go back and break our own national record this year in the distance medley relay," Collins said. "It looks like we have a good shot."

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