



Photos by Elizabeth Nida Obert / enida@postbulletin.com

The newly opened People's Food Cooperative features organic and healthy food products, a coffee shop, a deli, a bakery, a fresh meat section and a full cosmetics counter.

# Co-op produces buzz downtown

BY JEFF KIGER

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A grocery store and additional housing have long been at the top of many wish lists for downtown Rochester. Both wishes came true Tuesday.

The new People's Food Cooperative and the Metropolitan Market Place apartment complex opened their doors at 519 First Ave. S.W. following a series of comments from city officials, the developers and co-op leaders involved in the multimillion-dollar project.

"Five years ago, or even three years ago, if you had told me that this would happen, I would have laughed in your face," former Rochester cooperative board president Dan Litwiller told the nearly 50 people gathered for the opening. "This is a great example of a grassroots community project. I look forward to watching what this will do to downtown Rochester."

Litwiller said "the air is full of electricity" from developers interested in Rochester after the announcement of Mayo Clinic's Destination Medical Center.

Peter Gerrard, one of the developers of the complex, said that, while his firm has long been interested in Rochester, "our timing with this is golden."

The almost 27,000-square-foot store is the new home of the former Good Food Cooperative, which merged with the La Crosse, Wis.-based People's Food in 2011. The merged organization has almost 7,000 members.

The just-finished store drew oohs



People's Food Cooperative and Metropolitan Market apartment complex building opened Tuesday at 519 First Ave. S.W.

and aahs from city and business leaders, as well as co-op members wandering through for the first time.

In addition to aisles of organic and health-conscious foods, the co-op features a coffee shop, a deli with a large seating area, a bakery, a fresh meat section and a full cosmetics counter.

Cooperative CEO Michelle Schry and Rochester store manager Liz Haywood say the move to the much larger, updated store meant tripling the number of employees from 30 to

90. The old store at 1001 Sixth St. N.W. is closed.

Stacked on top of People's Food are 62 apartments, which tenants began moving into during the Labor Day weekend. Gerrard said more than 75 percent of the units are leased.

This is the first recent major development in the far southern portion of downtown, though the mayor and others say it will not be the last.

From the steps of the new store, Mayor Ardel Brede told the crowd that, several years ago, he was at a design conference where it was said anything south of Fourth Street was "a dead end."

"That has changed," he said. "This is now a new crossroads of Rochester. This gives us a lot of new options."

The Metropolitan Marketplace is also near where the University of Minnesota Rochester campus is slated to be built.

"Hopefully, this is one of the first projects we'll have leading down to the UMR campus," Rochester Development Administrator Doug Knott said.

He's not the only one with that vision.

"We hope this metropolitan Metropolitan Market Place will anchor this part of downtown to create a synergy for better things to come," Gerrard said as he watched people walk around the new store.