

Produce shop helping paint new face on center

By Jamie Clary

A locally-owned produce market has filled an empty store space and brightened the future of a 20-year-old Hendersonville commercial center.

Opened in 1976, Maple Row has been the location for three grocery stores, a Kmart and an Eckerd drug store.

Of those, only Kmart remains in the center that pulled Hendersonville's retail development toward the more residential eastern end of the city when it opened in 1976.

Since then, three grocers have located nearby and have created competition for the commercial center.

The last grocery store in Maple Row closed in 1991, and Eckerd moved out last year. With a Wal-Mart store a mile away, Kmart suffered and consumer traffic declined.

The only other national name in Maple Row was Radio Shack, leaving locally-owned shops to carry more of the burden of bringing in traffic to the shopping cen-

ter. Meanwhile, what had been an anchor space for Maple Row sat empty until Four Seasons Produce moved in during April.

Owned by Meredith Hudgens and Rhonda Johnson, Four Seasons moved from another Hendersonville location with 4,300 square feet to Maple Row's empty 22,000 square feet.

Says Hudgens of the larger space, "The demand was there and we no longer had the room to carry the produce that is available. We could not carry what people were requesting."

The new space also enabled Four Seasons to increase its freezer products from six doors to 26. As part of the remodeling of the store interior, a mural featuring fruits and vegetables covers the walls.

Says Elbert Jones, mayoral assistant for economic/community development, "The store will bring a lot more traffic to that shopping center. And, it will put pressure on other grocery stores for their selection and quality of produce."

Jones had shown the space to other businesses since it became available in 1991.



NBJ photo by Dan Loftin
Four Seasons Produce co-owner Meredith Hudgens stands with Mike Cooper of Murals & More, who painted a mural of fruits and vegetables throughout the market's interior.

"Four Seasons will enhance the area," he adds. "It's not very flattering to have large spaces vacant."

However, the new tenant will not be bringing in customers on Saturdays since

the owners, who are Seventh Day Adventists, keep the store closed.

Says Hudgens, "We would just be one more chore for people to do on Saturdays. We don't want to be a chore." ■