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FOUNDED IN 1905

Markets to build 22-acre Anaheim base

Former battery plant to become headquarters for Northgate chain.

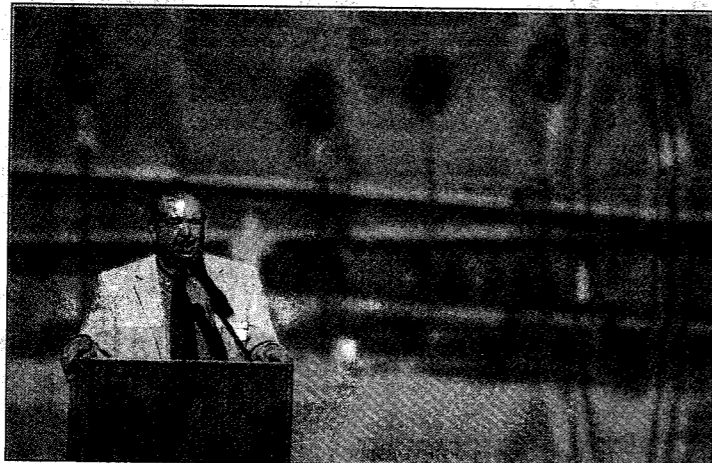
By ERIC CARPENTER
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

ANAHEIM • What began as a single Mexican market in 1980 inside a small Anaheim storefront has grown into a successful family-owned chain of 29 stores in four counties.

On Tuesday, officials with the Gonzalez Northgate Markets kicked off a construction project that shows just how far the supermarket chain has come.

Northgate took over the 22-acre site near the 91 and 5 freeways and plans to redevelop the former Delco Battery plant into its corporate headquarters and distribution center.

The site has been cleared, except for the two baseball



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Oscar Gonzalez speaks at the groundbreaking for Gonzalez Northgate Markets' new headquarters.

fields at the far north end of the property, which will remain for the West Anaheim Little League.

Cornerstone/Birtcher partnership will construct a 384,000-square-foot headquarters, including up to 30,000 square feet of office space and 30 truck docks, suit-

ing the needs of a chain that stretches from Los Angeles County to the Mexican border and continues to expand.

The contract calls for Northgate to lease-to-own over the next 15 years.

Company officials declined to say how much the construction project would cost, but

news reports indicate the land alone sold for \$20 million.

Northgate's 30th store is set to open in June in Oxnard in Ventura County.

"This is the land of opportunity. And our family is a good example of that," said Miguel Gonzalez, the eldest brother, who opened the first store with his father and brother 29 years ago.

Gonzalez spoke Tuesday at a groundbreaking ceremony attended by all five Anaheim City Council members as a mariachi band played in the background.

He choked back tears as he recalled his father's commitment to customers.

"My father used to bring home the soft tomatoes and the run-down meat for dinners," he recalled. "My mom would ask, 'Why is the food like this?' And he would say, 'Because we need to save all of

the best food for our customers.' That's the way he taught us - always the customers first."

Northgate's officials say the company's rise is the true fulfillment of the American dream. The company's story can be traced back more than 50 years, when the family, lead by patriarch Don Miguel Gonzalez, moved north to Los Angeles from Jalostotlán, Mexico. In the late '70s, the family opened a small store on Anaheim Boulevard with such offerings as fresh tortillas, salsas and other Mexican staples that were hard to find or unavailable at popular American supermarkets.

The chain has more than doubled in size in the past 10 years, most recently expanding into San Diego County. Northgate has 12 locations in Orange County: Six are in Santa Ana; four in Anaheim.

Northgate Markets employs more than 4,700 people. Officials declined to discuss company revenue; but published reports indicated that in 2003, with fewer

than half of the stores it has now, Northgate had \$286 million in sales.

The new distribution center, three times as large as its current facility in downtown Anaheim, is expected to provide 400 permanent jobs and at least 500 construction jobs, company and city officials said. The target completion date is fall 2010.

"Anaheim has been very good to us," Gonzalez said. "The new location makes sense logistically, but we also wanted to stay in Anaheim."

Anaheim officials say they're thrilled Northgate will remain in the city.

"It's great news for us to see them pursuing a project this large - especially in these tough economic times," said Councilman Harry Sidhu.