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Food distribution to grow with new Paramount center

By Karen Robes, Staff writer

PARAMOUNT - Food will hit Paramount in a big way in the coming months.

A 551,897-square-foot regional dry goods distribution warehouse is being built for Kroger Co. grocers on 26 acres that once housed the brass mill of Cerro Metals, which relocated in 2004 to North Carolina.

The company that owns Ralph's and Food 4 Less recently inked a 30-year, \$207 million lease, a move that relocates the distribution center from Riverside to a technologically advanced "green" facility at 14900 Garfield Ave. in Paramount.

"This is an opportunity that the market is unlikely to see again anytime soon because of the scarcity of land in the region," said Shannon Hondl, senior vice president of development/acquisitions of Birtcher Development & Investments, developer of the project for the Ohio-based company. "We expect the facility and The Kroger Co. will have a long-term positive effect on the community and the transaction speaks to the strength of the current marketplace."

Construction is expected to continue beyond 2008, city officials said.

Arriving sooner to town is a Fresh and Easy Neighborhood Market, which will open in December in a recently renovated shopping center at Downey Avenue and Alondra Boulevard.

"Personally, I'm excited about the Fresh and Easy," said Mayor Peggy Lemons. "As a working mom, it's nice to be able to pick up something on the way home that's healthy and satisfying to my family. Variety is always good and we don't have anything like that in the city."

Also coming to Paramount is a Subway and the city's third Starbucks, which will be part of a retail center with 56 parking spaces at Garfield and Rosecrans avenues.

City officials say the two stores will draw customers from neighboring South Gate and Compton.

Meanwhile, the city remains business-focused. The Paramount Chamber of Commerce is working to boost its membership to 400 by the fiscal year and the city has reworked its Commercial Rehab Program, which allows the city to pay a high percentage for exterior remodels of business properties in town.

"This has been a successful tool for both attracting small business and keeping the physical environment on our major streets clean and vibrant," said City Manager Linda Benedetti-Leal.

Benedetti-Leal said Paramount's Wal-Mart and The Home Depot continue to be among the highest-revenue producers among each chain's area outlets and that vacancy rates for industrial properties are low in the city.

"Overall, retail sales have been strong in Paramount for the last decade, and we see only improvement for that in the coming year," she said.

