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Wal-Mart, Meijer expanding in Michigan

Jaclyn Trop / The Detroit News

Two retail giants, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Meijer Inc., plan to open or expand 17 stores in Metro Detroit and Michigan by next spring, creating more than 2,700 jobs, the retailers said separately Monday.

Wal-Mart is looking to expand or open 13 stores, from Clinton Township to Traverse City, this year and next, and hire about 1,500 workers, said company spokesman Nick Infante. The expansion is part of the national discount retailer's efforts to gain market share in Michigan, a plan begun two or three years ago before the recession fully hit, he said.

Meijer Inc. will open four stores in Michigan, including two in Metro Detroit, and create more than 300 jobs at each location, said Frank Guglielmi, a spokesman for the Grand Rapids-based chain. The expansion is in line with the company's focus on "slow, steady growth," adding a handful of stores annually to its roster of 189.

"The Meijer family is committed to Michigan and always has been," Guglielmi said. "Even in a tough economy, we continue to move forward and to invest."

The companies' Michigan expansion comes despite a lingering recession -- the state has the nation's highest unemployment rate at 15 percent -- that has many shoppers curtailing spending.

The efforts also come as other retailers have closed or liquidated stores nationally. Kmart, which traces its roots to Detroit and now is part of Sears Holding Corp., will close stores in Troy, Farmington and Commerce Township by November.

The investment in the state by Wal-Mart and Meijer is "a signal of confidence in Michigan's recovery," said Scott Watkins, a senior consultant with the Anderson Economic Group in East Lansing.

"That alone is more valuable than the direct jobs that will be created by this," he said.

Competition will force Meijer to "continue being innovative and competitive with prices," as Wal-Mart aggressively expands within the state, Watkins said.

Wal-Mart, which has traditionally served suburban markets, is breaking into Midwest metro

areas such as Detroit and Chicago, Infante said.

"Now we're seeing opportunity where we can get into more urban markets," he said.

The Bentonville, Ark.-based retailing giant plans to debut an expanded Canton Township store and open stores in Monroe and Saline in September. Expanded Woodhaven, Belleville and Traverse City stores will open in October. A store in Clinton Township is scheduled to open in November.

The retailer also plans to open stores in Livonia and Canton Township and expand its White Lake store in 2010.

The average wage for Wal-Mart's full-time hourly associates in the Great Lakes State is \$11.44 per hour. The retailer also supports 71,303 supplier jobs here, according to the company's Web site.

Wal-Mart, which operates 67 supercenters and 17 discount stores in Michigan, collected more than \$234.9 million in sales tax for the 2009 fiscal year, paying more than \$59.7 million in state and local taxes, Wal-Mart's Web site said.

Meijer will open a store in Hartland in October, as well as three others in Petoskey, Rochester Hills and Grand Rapids in the spring.

The company also plans to remodel 12 of its Michigan stores, including Auburn Hills, Belleville and Howell, by the end of next year.

The private, family-owned company has stores in five states: Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Illinois. There are three dozen stores in Metro Detroit. The retailer recently announced plans to open its first store in the city of Detroit to anchor the new Shoppes at Gateway Park development at Woodward and Eight Mile.

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