

Hiller's puts exotic touch on new market

\$6M invested to convert ex-Farmer Jack

By MAUREEN McDONALD
Special to The Detroit News

UNION LAKE — Shopping carts strolled through the aisles of the new, 50,000-square-foot supermarket in this upscale northern Oakland County suburb. Owner Jim Hiller gutted a Farmer Jack and spent \$6 million converting it to a lifestyle center with its own Sanders' Ice Cream Parlor and exotic fruits and meats.

"Nearly everyone regards grocery shopping as the ultimate drag. I'm out to make it a surprising and delightful experience," said Hiller, owner of seven upscale supermarkets in Metro Detroit and Ann Arbor, who pulls out a can of Heinz Spotted Dick (sponge pudding) to illustrate his point. "We expect people will come as much as 50 miles to satisfy a craving for items they can't get anywhere else."

Beyond the ice cream parlor and circular glass deli, thunder and lightening sounds in the produce aisle as mists moisten broccoli and bibb lettuce. The fruit section includes kiwano horned mel-



Hiller

Hiller's Market

■ **Specialty:** The Southfield-based grocery chain added its seventh and largest market to the company with annual sales of \$200 million.

■ **Owner:** Jim Hiller, an attorney and son of a Detroit butcher, oversees 1,200 employees, including a British buyer, Lynette Kidd; a Japanese service director, Satomi Matsuda; and a director of specialty and deli foods, Rick Halberg.

■ **Hours:** The Union Lake store is open 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday.

■ **Contact:** www.hillers.com or (248) 363-8718

ons and champagne mangos and the meat counter offers Amish chickens, along with rattlesnake, quail and ground kangaroo.

Customers can order cakes decorated with Giselle, the princess of the Disney movie "Enchanted," or six kinds of fresh tiramisu. They will find eight shelves of mustard, a bounty of hummus and 20 kinds of sake amid an inventory of 270,000 products. Hiller boasts about one

of the largest selections of gluten-free offerings in the Midwest.

"An endocrinologist from the University of Michigan told us we'd build a faithful market with gluten-free products. Health advocates of all sorts are drawn to these items," Hiller said.

Michelle Galorneau, owner of the Treasure House resale store in Waterford, is delighted to have a Hiller's closer to her home and store. The Hiller's at 14 Mile and Haggerty will continue operations.

"I just love shopping at Hiller's," Galorneau said.

Hiller, who cites \$200 million in annual sales, said most supermarkets are stocked by number crunchers and management experts, not gourmet consultants.

He has a professional chef and managers from several ethnic groups advising him on taste and traditions. Is he worried about the area economy stalling?

"I'm providing 125 new jobs at this store," Hiller said. "I'm supporting a host of Michigan entrepreneurs and raising the bar on quality. The average income in Commerce Township is \$76,000. People need groceries."

Maureen McDonald is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.

Business

Hiller's opens new supermarket ►
in Union Lake. LOCAL SPOTLIGHT 2C



Local spotlight



Jim Hiller spent \$6 million to create a market that sells kiwano horned melons, rattlesnake and quail.