



## **Refreshed Earth Fare reopening organic and natural food grocery in St. Johns County**

Teresa Stepzinski

January 18, 2021

Under new ownership, Earth Fare a national organic and natural foods grocer intends to reopen its St. Johns County store — roughly a year after declaring bankruptcy resulting in a nationwide liquidation including its three Jacksonville-area stores.

The store will reopen at the Shoppes of St. Johns Parkway in St. Johns in the second quarter of this year 2021, company officials with Earth Fare and commercial real estate owner and developer Sleiman Enterprises announced last Thursday. Jan. 14.

"This is a growing area and desirable location with great demographics, so we are excited to call St. Johns home again," said Randy Talley, co-founder, chief sustainability officer, and director of leasing at Earth Fare, said in a Jan. 14 news release.

"This area wants a specialty healthy grocery store and we are happy to deliver the community an organic and natural foods grocery store," Talley said.

The reopening date hasn't been finalized, according to the company.

Earth Fare currently has 17 stores throughout the Eastern and Southeastern United States.

The 24,144 square-foot supermarket will anchor the shopping center — owned by Sleiman Enterprises — off County Road 210 West in northern St. Johns County, which is classified as one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation.

Other shopping center tenants either open or soon to open include Xtreme Wings, RaceTrac, Canopy Road Café, Ember & Iron and Hot Spot Power Yoga.

The resurrected Earth Fare is returning to 120 Shops Blvd. in the shopping center — the same location where it originally opened in October 2019.

In February 2020, all Earth Fare stores nationwide closed when the North Carolina-based company sought Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

Both Jacksonville stores — 11901 Atlantic Blvd. and 11700 San Jose Blvd. — were shuttered and subsequently sold at that time.

Southeastern Grocers Inc. expanded its grocery holdings in Florida by purchasing the San Jose Boulevard store and opened it as a Winn-Dixie on Veterans Day last year.

Now, the St. Johns store is coming back. It was unknown whether any other Northeast Florida Earth Fare stores would be revived.

“By welcoming Earth Fare back to St. Johns, we are providing the community with a healthy choice in the market for groceries, which we believe is desperately needed in more communities across the country,” Toney Sleiman, principal at Sleiman, said in the news release.

“Earth Fare promises to provide communities, sometimes underserved, with healthy foods and locally sourced items. It’s so important now to provide groceries and goods to sustain our communities and, ultimately, strengthen them,” Sleiman also said.

Shoppers will find a revitalized Earth Fare when they walk in the grocery store doors.

“You will find many of the same trusted brands and house-made specialties back in our store, and we are adding some new ones,” said David Isinghood, chief operations officer at Earth Fare.

Headquartered in Asheville, N.C., Earth Fare was founded in 1975. Until filing for bankruptcy, the company boasted that it was “one of the largest natural and organic food retailers in the country” with 50 stores across 10 states: including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The company website currently lists 17 open stores and five more slated to open soon. However, the St. Johns store wasn't listed as of Friday, Jan. 15

After Earth Fare filed for bankruptcy, a group of investors including Talley, Dennis Hulsing, an Asheville, N.C., businessman, and Mike Cianciarulo, a past president of Earth Fare, resurrected the brand and began reopening stores, reported the Citizen-Times newspaper of Asheville, N.C.