



West Augustine ready to welcome Family Dollar to the neighborhood

By Peter Willott
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When Greg White presides over the ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday morning for the new Family Dollar store on West King Street, it will be the happy end of a yearslong process to bring a national chain to the West Augustine community.

It will also be the culmination of 14 years of work that he put in as chair of the steering committee for the West Augustine Community Redevelopment Agency, White said in a recent phone interview.

“It’s just a game changer in our neighborhood,” White said of the store’s opening.

White recently stepped down from his position with the CRA — passing leadership to the Rev. Ron Rawls of St. Paul AME Church — but is continuing his work with the neighborhood’s Weed and Seed Program and remains focused on economic development for the community he calls home.

Rawls told *The Record* on Friday he won’t be able to attend the 7:30 a.m. event because he has plans to be out of town, but he is happy for White to preside over the ceremony because of the work he did in bringing the business to the neighborhood.

But White maintains the work was a team effort, with Family Dollar, the CRA and local governments all pitching in.

“I tip my hat off to the city because they made sure the infrastructure was there,” he said.

And the county also gets a tip of the hat for putting the Planned Unit Development process for the store on the “fast track,” he said.

White said the process of getting the store in the community started about four years ago when the CRA began “just looking at the possibilities.”

“Family Dollar came into the picture, and they just seemed like they were a little more aggressive,” he said. “We kind of reached out to each other.”

According to the company’s website, the King Street location will be the fourth Family Dollar store to open in St. Johns County.

The 8,000 square-foot building will feature the company’s newest layout, and a grand opening celebration will continue on Saturday with family activities and a gift card giveaway for the first 50 shoppers after the 8 a.m. opening, according to a news release from Family Dollar.

White said in a past interview that he considers the West Augustine neighborhood to be a “food desert.” The immediate benefit of the store’s opening is that it will offer competitive pricing for necessary items — like loaves of bread, gallons of milk and laundry detergent — as opposed to the higher prices seen at the corner stores that dot the neighborhood, he said.

It will also mean jobs.

“I have seen several young West Augustine residents doing their training there,” White said, adding that he is hopeful those jobs will also bring needed benefits like medical and dental insurance.

And it is also just a proud moment for the community. Although stores like a Pic 'n Save and Pantry Pride have opened — and since closed — out toward U.S. 1, White said the Family Dollar will be the first national chain to open deep in the community,

“I’m talking West Augustine ... west of the tracks,” he said.

“It is big to us,” he said. “Trust me, it is.”