



Food clubs: a cost comparison

Would the cost of a membership to a warehouse club like Costco or SAM'S Club pay for itself?

I've pondered that question ever since Costco opened earlier this year and I started getting mailings from both places, inviting me to join.

At SAM'S Club, a one-year membership costs \$30 to \$35 and at Costco it costs \$35 to \$40. In both cases, the lower price is for a business membership and the higher one is for a regular membership.

When I visited both stores for the first time this summer, I couldn't tell if their grocery prices were good deals or not, because most of the items were packaged in larger quantities than I'm used to seeing or buying.

Now, Costco and SAM'S Club sell a lot of other things besides groceries — such as tires, office furniture and home electronics — and they offer benefits, such as discounts on optical and pharmaceutical services.

But I had decided that in order for a membership to be worth it to me, I'd have to recoup the membership fee in grocery savings alone, because I buy groceries more often and regularly than I buy those other things.

To help me figure out how good their grocery prices were, I made a spreadsheet on my computer last month.

In the first column, I listed groceries I typically buy. The other columns I left blank, except for their headings: size of item, brand name, price and expiration date. Then I took the spreadsheet to Costco, SAM'S Club, Kroger and F&M to fill in the blanks and compare costs. (You could do the same for the grocery store(s) where you usually shop.)

I found that Costco and SAM'S Club had basically the same prices. And for all but one of the items on my list, their prices beat Kroger and F&M by at least 10 cents. (The exception was Bounty Big Roll Medleys paper towels which were on sale at Kroger for about 50 cents less than the warehouse price.)

Some of the best deals I found were:

- Maxwell House coffee (regular, automatic drip in the blue can), \$5.99 for a 39-ounce can at SAM'S Club and Costco, compared to \$8.29 for the same size at F&M and \$7.29 for a 26-ounce can at Kroger.

- Tide laundry detergent, \$15.99 for a 263-ounce box (120 wash loads) at SAM'S Club and Costco, compared to \$19.99 for the same size at Kroger and \$8.99 for a 92-ounce box (42 wash loads) at F&M.

- Cheerios cereal, \$5.08 for a 35-ounce box at SAM'S Club and \$7.99 for a 65-ounce box at Costco (they both equal 14.5 cents per ounce), compared to \$4.69 for a 20-ounce box at Kroger and \$3.69 for a 15-ounce box at F&M.

- Jiff peanut butter (creamy or crunchy), \$5.99 for two 40-ounce jars at Costco and SAM'S Club, compared to \$4.99 for one 40-ounce jar at Kroger and \$2.29 for 18 ounces at F&M.

The amount of money I'd save on those products alone over the course of a year would be almost enough to offset the cost of a membership, I've determined. But every family is different.

My advice is, make up your own list, estimate your yearly usage for each item and do some cost comparisons. Factor in how much you currently save by using coupons, because Costco and SAM'S Club don't accept them (although they do have rebate offers). And remember, if you don't have room to store something, it's not a good deal, no matter what the price.

Most people I know who have joined a warehouse club still go to their regular grocery store for most things and visit the warehouse only once a month or so, to stock up on non-perishable items and party supplies.

Costco is located in Bloomfield Township, Livonia, Madison Heights and Roseville. SAM'S Club is located in Farmington Hills, Madison Heights, Roseville, Southfield, Southgate, Utica, Waterford, Westland and Ypsilanti. Call or visit them for more information.



Vertically challenged: Top, Vertical Reality game under construction. Bottom photo, the actual game that will mesmerize competitors at GameWorks in Auburn Hills.

BY LINDA BACHRACK
STAFF WRITER

You've entered The Arena. In a frenetic atmosphere that's charged with excitement, larger-than-life visuals and pulsating music jar the senses, transporting you into a Disney-like fantasy land.

First stop — Vertical Reality. Strap yourself in and get ready to race the clock in an eight-player vertical challenge game that has you ascending 24 feet as you target the criminal elements who are invading the skyscraper that looms before your eyes. Aim well. If you're hit by the bad guys, you'll find yourself in a "free fall" descent that will take your breath away and leave you struggling to race back up to the top. Vertical Reality is the only game of its kind in which players experience physical consequences based on their actions.

No, you're not on a Hollywood movie set, you're in GameWorks Detroit, a creation of escapist master Steven Spielberg. This social gathering place of the 21st century opens Nov. 12 in the Great Lakes Crossing shopping/entertainment center on Baldwin Road in Auburn Hills.

GameWorks feels like an amusement park. Folks of all ages can eat, drink and test their gamesmanship in a venue comprised of a series of high-energy, visually stimulating and relaxing environments that include a full-service restaurant and bar. The innovative playland, conceived by Universal Studios and Sega Enterprises, as well as Spielberg's DreamWorks SKG, is the sixth GameWorks destination in the United States and the first in the Midwest.

You'll find two distinct personalities in this high-tech arcade. By day, GameWorks is a cool place to have lunch with friends or business associates, conduct corporate meetings and engage in a little friendly head-to-head competition. Kids are welcome to shoot hoops, munch on pizza and rack up points in classic games like Pac-Man and Asteroids. After 5 p.m., the mood changes and GameWorks becomes an adult destination with a

different menu, a full bar featuring such signature cocktails as the Joy Stick and Alien Autopsy, a variety of socially engaging areas and electrically charged game zones where alcohol is allowed.

Some years ago, after the release of E.T., Spielberg began working his magic for hospitalized kids through video conferencing that allowed the

children to communicate with other children in hospitals around the country. He says that he received so many letters from kids who asked if they could be healed by E.T.'s touch, he was determined to give these young patients some kind of intervention through interaction.

His Starbright World, linking hospitals from coast to coast, has evolved to include interactive sports games and cartoons that explain medical procedures. This same technology allows game-playing adults to join in interactive competitions at GameWorks. Says President and CEO Michael Montgomery, "Players want to be heroes, and they can in our MTV-like on-screen head-to-head challenges among different cities."

Since the GameWorks themed "neighborhood" environments may cause disorientation and sensory overload for the first-time visitor, we provide a tour of the 34,000-square-

LIFE IS A GAME GameWorks redefines the way we play



Revved to open: GameWorks General Manager Chris Martin unveils an Indy 500 car that will zoom players through a motion simulated game at the new entertainment destination, opening Nov. 12.

foot space, compliments of General Manager Chris Martin:

- The Loading Dock is the high-energy zone where the newest games are "unloaded" straight from the delivery trucks and put to the test by hard-core enthusiasts. A combination of industrial and warehouse space, the Loading Dock has the look, feel and pulse of an underground nightclub with theatrical lighting and large video screens.

- The Arena features several multi-player signature games designed exclusively for GameWorks. The most kinetic of the three neighborhoods, The Arena mixes the high-tech thrills of video games with the excitement of theme park-style attractions. The centerpiece is the above-mentioned Vertical Reality, which debuted on MTV. Also find Spielberg's Jurassic Park: The Lost World, a terrifying old-fashioned dino fight in a dramatic environment complete with movie props.

- The Arena's video screen cluster showcases videos, music and game competitions.

- Also on the main floor, the GameWorks Grill is a full-service restaurant offering casual upscale dining with menu items that include gourmet salads, pizza, pasta, focaccia sandwiches and grilled entrees. Umbrella tables spill out onto the patio in the mall.

- Adjacent to the Grill is the Arena Bar serving beers, California wines and cocktails. Architectural columns enclose classic pinball machines.

- Venture into the Prize Zone where players accumulate points on dozens of games and redeem their points for prizes.

- Upstairs, intimate areas provide pool tables, a second-level bar, retro games and the Racing Zone with an Indy 500 attraction.

- The Skybox Lounge, a GameWorks original, offers the best seats in the house. Leather furniture and a spectacular glass wall provide a plush hideaway from which to observe all the revved-up action below. This VIP party room is open to all guests and also is available for private parties and corporate events.

- To play, eat, drink and socialize, all guests need is a play card, which works like an ATM card and is good to play and pay for all GameWorks activities, food, beverage and merchandise.

- "Playing is about fun, excitement, competition and bringing people together," says Spielberg. "It's about escape, adventure and connecting. It gives each person the chance to prove that he or she can be a star."

GameWorks hosts a Charity Preview to benefit Hospice of Michigan on Tuesday, Nov. 10 from 7 p.m. to midnight.

Watch members of the Detroit Red Wings as they compete on Vertical Reality. Swing to the sounds of the Twisted Tunes. Don't miss the "Battle of the Big Kahuna" led by Tim Leutette, president and COO of Penske Corp. Well-known CEOs will compete in an Indy 500 auto racing simulation game. \$75. (800) 669-9335.

GameWorks, Great Lakes Crossing, Baldwin Road, off I-75 in Auburn Hills.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

Freedom to Die, which places this civil rights struggle in the framework of American social history, 7 p.m. Borders Book Shop, 31150 Southfield Road, Birmingham.

—WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28

AUTHOR EVENT
Borders Books and the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) have set aside today as a day of awareness. Borders presents award-winning children's author Patricia Polacco who will discuss and sign her most recent book, *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, a story that deals sensitively with dyslexia. She also will sign her brand-new book, *Mrs. Mack*. 7 p.m. Borders Books & Music, 34300 Woodward, Birmingham.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

SMALL SIZES

A Liz Claiborne representative discusses fall fashions, styles and clothing as they relate specifically to the petite customer. Includes a box lunch. 11:30 a.m. Petite Department, Parisian, Laurel Park Place, Livonia; (734) 953-7600.

TAILOR MADE

View the Alan Flusser Fall 1998 Collection. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saks Fifth Avenue, Somerset Collection, Troy. Call for an appointment, (248) 614-3374.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1

MORE BEANIES

The Plymouth Beanie Baby Show returns to the Plymouth Cultural Center, 625 Farmer Street. Beanie Baby door prizes every hour. 11 a.m.-3 p.m. \$4, \$2 ages 4-12.

News of special events for shoppers is included in this calendar. Send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009; or fax (248) 644-1314. Deadline: Wednesday 5 p.m. for publication on Sunday.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25

FASHION FIX

Lynn Portnoy presents First Aid for Fall Fashions. Bring in your favorite jacket, pants or outfit and let the experts at Lynn Portnoy inject new life into your fall wardrobe. Informal modeling and light refreshments. 12-4 p.m. 28260 Franklin Road, Southfield

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27

BOOK SIGNING

Derek Humphrey, founder of the Hemlock Society, discusses his private and public struggles over physician-assisted dying and signs his new book