

TRADER JOE'S

FROM PAGE B1

interesting find for the day was a one-pound box of freshly frozen, vacuum-packed gnoochi for \$1.79.

"It's a good price, I'm willing to give it a try," she said.

Trader Joe's in Farmington Hills is just yards away from Whole Foods. The Royal Oak location is across the street from Westborn Market. Both stores carry produce. Millis said the store philosophy is not about competition.

"We're in the same market as Whole Foods, but we aren't out to put anyone out of business," he said. "We sincerely believe there's enough business for both."

The attitude at Whole Foods Market, however, was different. "Whole Foods considers Trader Joe's a competitor and we take that competition seriously because we do share the same customers," said Susan



Bill Bresler Staff Photographer

Items like Imported Blu Italian Mineral Water for 99 cents and imported and domestic cheeses are specialties at the store.

Bellinson, marketing director of Whole Foods stores in Michigan. Another Trader Joe's strong point is the offering of value-priced wine. Combining private labels with relatively unknown producers has allowed the market to offer customers a wide variety of bargains, many in the \$5 range.

Though not stunners, most wines are perfectly fine for everyday drinking. Millis said Trader Joe's sells products at low prices for several reasons: The company carries the same items at all its nationwide stores; special orders aren't considered; large-quantity purchases gives negotiating power to the company; and the company says it makes

its purchases in cash. Also, the majority of store items are sold on the TJ's private label.

FUN THEME
The Farmington Hills store has a lake theme. Wooden paddles mark the numbers of each register and a wall mural is titled "Lake TJ's Farmington Hills."

The Royal Oak store also has a nautical theme and Motown music memorabilia. Employees sport Hawaiian shirts and make a point to approach cus-

tomers with offers of assistance. "We get about 15 new items each week, so there's always new things being added," Millis said.

Eccentric Managing Editor Joe Bauman contributed to this story.

WHAT IS IT?

What is Trader Joe's? It might be easier to explain what it is not.

It's not a regular grocery store although it sells snacks, frozen dinners, meals, fruits, vegetables, desserts, pet food, wine and beer, shampoos and soaps made with natural ingredients.

It's not a discount store even though its prices are competitive with nearby grocers. For example, frozen strawberries are \$1.69 per pound, four ounces of Blue Hills smoked tuna \$3.99, pine nuts less than \$9 per pound; and one gram of saffron is just \$2.99. Artichoke and three cheese ravioli with olives is

\$2.99, and four and a half pounds of creamy dark chocolate \$7.99.

It's also not a health food store even though much of the food is organic with a large, but not exclusive, vegetarian and vegan selection.

And it's not a gourmet market even though it carries Arabica coffee beans and 60 cheeses from the U.S., France, Switzerland, Norway and Italy. It also carries a large selection of flash frozen salmon, snow crab ravioli and Australian free range beef and buffalo burgers.

It's not marketed as a beer and wine store even though it carries both. Trader Joe's is a mix of the above rolled into one.



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