

# Inside Tracks

Store-within-a-store concepts take hold as Mariano's continues its Chicago-area expansion. **By Jim Dudlicek**

**I**n the five years since Roundy's Inc. launched its Mariano's Fresh Market banner in Chicago and its suburbs, the Milwaukee-based chain has transformed the shopper experience for consumers throughout the region.

In fact, most Chicago-area mainstream supermarket shoppers arguably were experiencing a significant drought when it came to grocery merchandising innovation until Mariano's, the brainchild of Roundy's chief Bob Mariano, opened its first store in the northwest suburb of Arlington Heights in July 2010.

Now, half a decade and more than 30 stores

later, Mariano's — whose ranks have swelled through the acquisition of about a dozen former Dominick's locations from Safeway — has become a favorite of shoppers who embrace its extensive fresh selections, prepared foods, competitive pricing and overall "foodiness."

Those shoppers have been further rewarded with unique destination concepts whose development has paralleled the banner's evolution, some of which are unique to their respective locations. "Each time we join a new community, we commit ourselves to getting to know the tastes and preferences of our customers so that we can truly

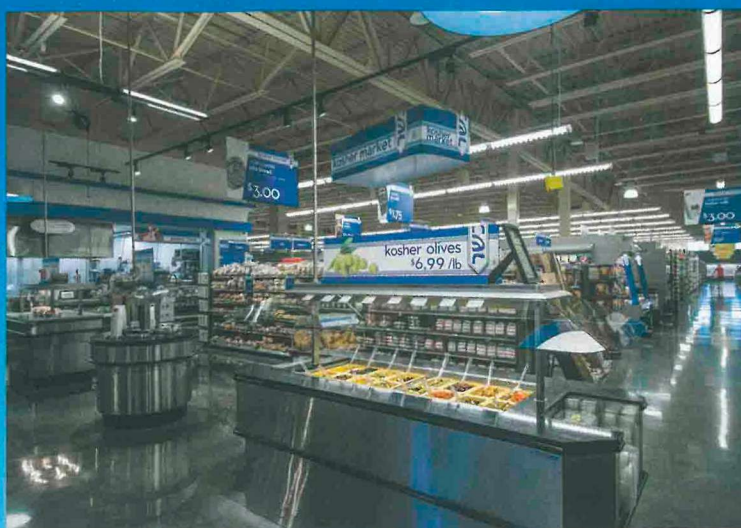




make it a neighborhood store,” says Amanda Puck, director of strategic brand development for Mariano’s, one of four banners operated by Roundy’s.

The newest store-within-a-store concepts at Mariano’s are expertly executed and address both neighborhood needs and overall market desire for specialty offerings.

Mariano’s debuted its first dedicated kosher market at its store in Skokie, Ill., which opened this past April 21. Additionally, on June 30, the banner cut the ribbon on its newest (as of this writing) and largest (90,000-plus square feet) location in Northbrook, which includes Mariano’s Signature Curation Center, designed to showcase artisanal products from around the world. This store, known as Glenview West, also includes three other features unique to the location: a cheese and charcuterie cave, a fresh guacamole counter, and on-site coffee roasting.



#### AISLES TO ISLES

The olive and soup bars are among the first features encountered in the Kosher Market at Mariano’s Skokie.

“The mission of both the Kosher Market and the Curation Center ties into Mariano’s larger commitment to be an integral part of every community we join,” Puck says, explaining how the concepts are true to the banner’s tagline. “Both concepts work to meet the individual needs of our customers. By offering a quality selection of products that cater to individual lifestyles, we are able to ensure that all of our customers can ‘Shop Well. Eat Well. Live Well.’”



#### ABOVE AND BEYOND

Mariano’s Skokie takes the banner’s specialized offerings to new heights with a dedicated Kosher Market.



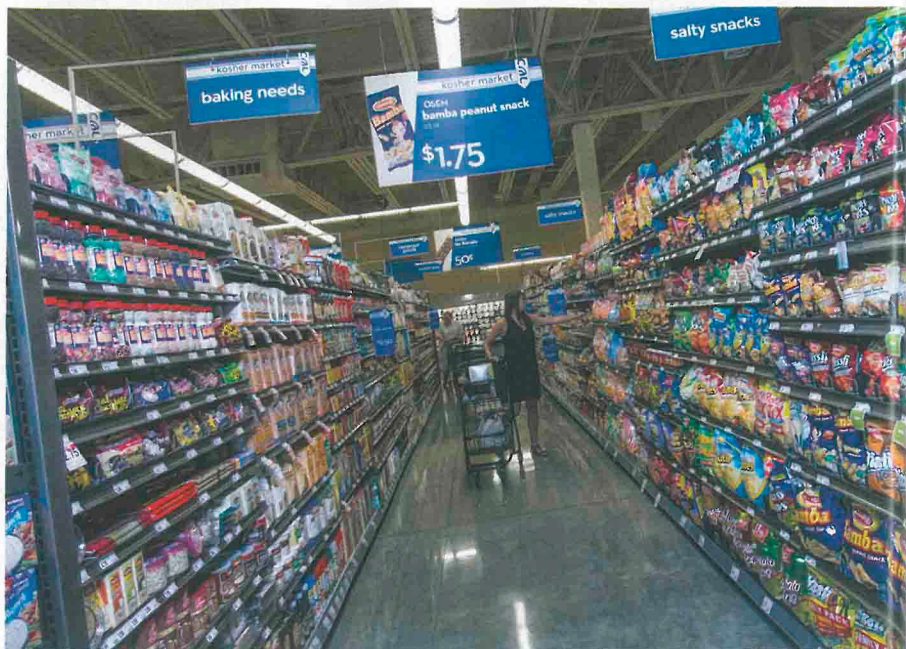
**SHELF APPEAL**

The Mariano's Kosher Market has its own "center store" with grocery items and supermarket staples.

**Kosher Market**

"The Skokie location marks a milestone for our customers, as it is our first store to offer a specialty kosher area," Mariano said on the occasion of the store's grand opening. "We looked at the community's needs and made the decision to go above and beyond what our customers have come to know and love — fresh, unique and local grocery offerings — by creating spaces in the store that allow us to be a true extension of the neighborhood."

Working in partnership with the Chicago Rabbinical Council, Mariano's designed a separate 5,275-square-foot section within the store that is kosher certified. Within the Kosher Market, shoppers will find a separate kosher Sweet Shoppe, cheese shop, deli, meat counter and grill, seafood counter and grill, and soup and olive bars, as well



as additional offerings.

The kosher section will respect the Sabbath each week (from sundown Friday through Saturday after sunset), reopening on Sunday morning.

"Given that many of our Skokie neighbors keep kosher, it only made sense to ensure that the Mariano's in their community fit their lifestyle," Puck explains. "We worked closely with the Chicago Rabbinical Council to help us develop our kosher offerings that include separate meat and seafood counters, each with a dedicated grill; freshly rolled sushi; hot prepared foods; hot soups; and baked breads."

Mariano's designed the store to be accessible to all shoppers, including individuals who are looking for only kosher offerings. The market offers a wide selection of staples, as well as unique items such as kosher sushi, prepared foods and specialty baked goods.

The Kosher Market fits seamlessly into the overall store floor plan, which may come as something of a surprise to shoppers used to navigating other Mariano's locations. In most of the banner's other stores, shoppers passing through the prepared food, deli and bakery area will hang a left turn between the specialty cheese shop and butcher counters to find the wine and spirits section with an adjoining beer cave. At the Skokie store, that same left turn takes you right into the Kosher Market, a wide area trimmed in blue and special signage to define this store within a store.

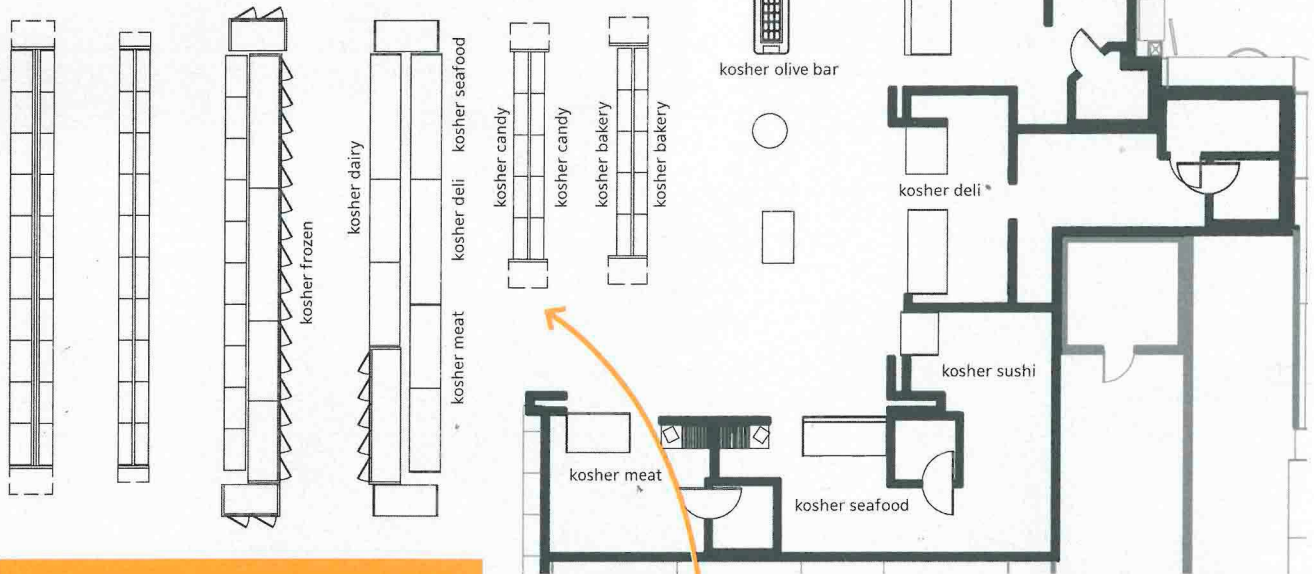
Along its perimeter are the kosher bakery and deli, and dedicated sushi counter, along with the kosher meat and seafood departments, which will

*Continued on page 30* ➤

**LOAVES AND LAYERS**

The dedicated kosher bake shop offers items ranging from cakes and cupcakes to breads and rolls.





## Mariano's Skokie

3358 W. Touhy Ave., Skokie, IL 60076

### Kosher Market

**Grand opening:** April 21, 2015

**Square footage:** 5,275, within the 71,310-square-foot store

**Features:** Sweet Shoppe, cheese shop, deli, meat counter and grill, seafood counter and grill, sushi, soup bar, olive bar

Market operates under the guidance of the Chicago Rabbinical Council





**AMPLE SAMPLES**

Shoppers can taste products from throughout the region and around the world in the Curation Center.

➤ *Continued from page 24*

prepare selections to order. The kosher soup and olive bar islands separate the perimeter from rows dedicated to commercial baked goods and candy, followed by aisles of kosher packaged meat, seafood and deli items; a dairy and frozen aisle; and three more aisles of grocery items.

Customer response has been outstanding, Puck says. "What we hear time and time again is that the Kosher Market is unlike anything else available at other stores," she relates. "Where else can you find kosher meats, seafood, bakery and grocery items all in one spot? We are thrilled that those who keep kosher have been able to find a spot that offers them both quality and variety."

Beyond the Kosher Market, the Skokie store features Mariano's mainstays like fresh-squeezed fruit and vegetable juices, caramel apples dipped on-site, specialty seafood and soup, a floral department, and a wine bar. Other signature features of the store include Vero premium coffees and gelato; Todds BBQ, offering daily smoked brisket and ribs; The Oyster Bar, with fresh shucked oysters and specialty seafood dishes; and the Squeez'd smoothie bar, showcasing a variety of made-to-order fruit and vegetable smoothies.

**BIGGEST LINK**

Glenview West is the chain's largest store, at more than 90,000 square feet.

**Curation Center**

The largest of the banner's 32 locations, Mariano's Glenview West store encompasses more than 90,000 square feet, providing shoppers with the brand's signature destinations, some new concepts



and a wealth of elbow room.

"We have designed a store unlike any other, offering something for everyone," Mariano said at the grand opening this past June. "If you're hosting a







**PLAN FOR ALL SEASONINGS**

From soothing to seething, the Curation Center offers flavors for diverse palates.

party and looking for something unique to serve, meeting friends for a cup of coffee or a home-made gelato, or need to shop for your family dinner, you're going to find what you need here."

Anchoring the innovations at Glenview West is Mariano's Signature Curation Center, designed to showcase artisanal products from across the globe. Each item is selected to educate shoppers and share the unique story of each supplier. Located in a broad boulevard within center store, the Curation Center's products include specialty olive oil, granola and whiskey. The center also features a demo station that allows purveyors to engage with shoppers, prepare special recipes, and hold seminars and tastings.



**GUAC THIS WAY**

Mariano's premiered its guacamole bar at the Glenview West store.

"We are always looking for the best products. Whether it comes from local purveyors in Chicago or is imported directly from Italy, our goal is to provide our customers with unique offerings so that they can experience incredible flavors from around the world," Puck says. "The Curation Center brings our mission to life. Each item featured in the Curation Center is hand-selected to educate shoppers and share the story of each purveyor, all [of which] share Mariano's passion for unforgettable food."

The Glenview West store was selected as the Curation Center launch site because of its size and regional appeal. "With its location right off Interstate 294, we felt the location was ideal for the



Curation Center, attracting both local shoppers and those who navigate the interstate on a regular basis," Puck explains.

Glenview West is also home to three other unique concepts. A cheese and charcuterie shop expands the specialty cheese department found at other stores into its own dedicated "cave," featuring dozens of cheeses and cured meats from around the world. The room is staffed by associates ready to offer samples and advice about the many products, and features cross-merchandised complementary offerings to provide shoppers with dining and entertaining solutions.

Additionally, the store houses the banner's first Vero coffee bar, with on-site roasted coffee beans. Finally, Mariano's introduced a made-to-order guacamole bar at the site, giving shoppers a chance to create their own custom recipes based on staff






**FORMAGGI  
FOLLOWS  
FUNCTION**

Sampling opportunities abound for shoppers in Glenview West's cheese cave.

suggestions, with a variety of add-ins to tailor guac to individual specifications.

These features join favorites like Oki Sushi; Todds BBQ; the Oyster Bar, with fresh-shucked oysters; and the Squeez'D smoothie bar, along with Veg'D, offering fresh-prepared vegetarian and vegan items.

"The Curation Center has drawn a lot of [customers'] eyes," Puck notes. "The selected products and demos showcased offer them an opportunity to try a new food item they maybe didn't know existed, as well as learn how they can use the item at home. The Curation Center is not only a chance to educate our eager customers, but also support artisanal products from around the globe."

**Keeping it Fresh**

These new concepts join the many other destination features that Mariano's shoppers in the Chicago area have come to know and love, including hot prepared foods, soup and salad bars, fresh-squeezed juices, full-service pharmacies, and cafés with free WiFi and live piano music.

With each Mariano's store offering its own unique features to set it apart from other locations in the city and suburbs, how does the banner determine which of these unique features to install in a given location?

"Innovation at Mariano's is a constant," Puck explains. "We don't simply create an idea for a new store per se — our ideas and creativity are always



evolving. We look at the diversity of the customer profile for each individual store and determine what makes sense for that particular location. Upon reviewing these factors, we design the stores with features that meet those needs. No matter the location, our goal is to always to make sure the store is a true extension of the community and offers customers a memorable shopping experience."

The challenges faced in adapting these concepts to the Mariano's store footprint are par for the course. "Whenever you introduce a new concept in a store, there will be certain challenges such as product sourcing, operations and labor," Puck acknowledges. "However, we have a significant amount of experience in delivering new concepts to our customers, which allows us to plan for and meet these challenges as they arise."

With evolving concepts like on-site smoked barbecue items and the Oyster Bar catching on at multiple locations, how soon might folks who shop at other Chicago-area Mariano's stores see their own Kosher Market or Curation Center?

"At this time, we have not publicly announced plans to open or replicate the Kosher Market or the Curation Center at other Mariano's locations," Puck says. "We will keep our customers posted as updates are made to new and existing stores. As we get closer to opening a new store, we will be able to share what exciting features are to come." **PG**


**LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

Amanda Puck, Mariano's strategic brand director, explains to *PG* Editor-in-Chief Jim Dudlicek how the Curation Center aims to educate shoppers and tell the stories behind the products.