

## Oakes Farms again targets November to open North Naples store



**Q:** You let us know that Oakes Farms' Seed to Table opening in North Naples was behind schedule. It was originally scheduled for a November opening. Do you have an update on their progress?

— *Richard Carruthers, Naples*

**Q:** Is the new Oakes Farms store going to open? Have heard many conflicting rumors, including (1) it will never open, (2) it will open April 2017, and (3) it will open November 2017. It was originally scheduled for 2015 when it was announced.

— *Robert Clarkson, North Naples*

**Q:** Oakes Farms was planning to open their new North Naples location last fall but it looks like there is much work to be done yet. And, are they planning additional stores in the complex as well?

— *Tony Gattone, North Naples*



**An interior rendering of Oakes Farms' Seed to Table store, targeted to open Nov. 6, 2017, on the northeast corner of Livingston and Immokalee roads in North Naples. (Photo: Courtesy of Oakes Farms)**

**A:** It's understandable if you don't believe Oakes Farms' Seed to Table food store will open Nov. 6 – the target launch date for the third consecutive year. But noticeable progress is being made on the massive project and that date is the goal again this year, said Alfie Oakes, founder and CEO of Naples-based Oakes Farms Inc.

"There's a still a lot to be done, but it's coming for sure," Oakes said Thursday. "The store is coming along well. I'm real optimistic that we'll make our Nov. 6 date. It seems like it's far away, but there's still so much to be done."

What's the significance of Nov. 6?

It's not only the date Alfie Oakes and his father, the late Frank Oakes, launched the original Oakes Farms Market on Davis Boulevard in East Naples more than 20 years ago, but it's his grandfather's birthday and his wife's birthday. The Oakes also launched their Food & Thought organic market and cafe in Naples on that date more than 10 years ago.

"It has exceedingly become more significant. It has symbolic meaning for sure. That's why we are really targeting to hit that," Oakes said.

Although there's emotional attachment to Nov. 6, if they miss the date this year Oakes promises he will not wait another year to open. But he also won't cut corners just to open the store on that date.

"More than anything, when we do have that opening day, it's going to be the way I want it," he said.



The Seed to Table store undoubtedly is highly anticipated, proven by today's sampling of questions that are representative of many more received from local residents.



**Oakes Farms' Seed to Table store will feature a second-story mezzanine with a high-end dinner restaurant and more.** *(Photo: Courtesy of Oakes Farms)*

Beyond what eventually will be a two-year delay, it's actually appropriate that the store is eagerly awaited. If it turns out as planned, the store is destined to be a local destination, a foodie paradise piled onto concepts of Oakes' produce and seafood markets, Food & Thought's healthy cuisine and Thoughtful Threads' organic clothing store.

"Not to be cocky, but I think we are going to create a landmark for Naples," Oakes said. "It's going to be a pretty cool place. It's just a bigger, grander version than we earlier planned."

When Oakes Farms purchased the former Albertsons grocery store on the northeast corner of Livingston and Immokalee roads in summer 2014, the original plan was to just create a big market, but now renderings show the new store will have a breathtaking, second-story mezzanine with a high-end dinner restaurant and much more. Oakes knew from the start that the project would be grand, but not to the extent of where it has taken him.

"Before, it was a big, gray vision or dream, but now I can visualize it," Oakes said.



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**Construction is in high gear at Oakes Farms' Seed to Table store, targeted to open Nov. 6, 2017, on the northeast corner of Livingston and Immokalee roads in North Naples. (Photo: Tim Aten/Naples Daily News)**

Of course, the project's expansion beyond its initial budget and intentions have led to delays in its construction, but Oakes feels it definitely will be worth it. To hear him rattle off some of the amenities and statistics for the 77,600-square-foot store sounds incredible: 19 walk-in coolers, 13 restaurant hood systems, a wood-fired brick oven for pizza, three different bars and more than 400 employees, including three trained at the Culinary Institute of America.

"We have five chefs we brought on board," Oakes said. "I've been told our kitchen is the fourth largest in Collier."

The size of Seed to Table will not just be bigger, but its food quality is designed to be over the top. The store is going to be a culinary mecca focusing on high-quality, super-fresh, from-scratch food, Oakes said.

"The passion to create that is what's going to make it special," he said. "If we stay true to the passion, people will come."



**An interior rendering shows a wine bar and retail section at Oakes Farms' Seed to Table store, targeted to open Nov. 6, 2017, on the northeast corner of Livingston and Immokalee roads in North Naples. (Photo: Courtesy of Oakes Farms)**

Oakes feels as if his store will have all the right chemistry to be one of best he's seen nationwide. And he should know because he flew in his jet during the last couple of years to visit all of the best retail stores around the country, he said.

"I still have not seen anything quite like what we are doing with this amount of fresh stuff," Oakes said.

Unlike a typical supermarket where fresh food can be found on the perimeter of the store while most of its center is filled with packaged and canned goods, Seed to Table is full of fresh items.

"The biggest thing is it doesn't have any of that in the center of the store," Oakes said. "We are basically taking that extra space and filling it in with prepared food and grab-and-go meals."





**An interior rendering shows areas for smoothies and burgers at Oakes Farms' Seed to Table store, targeted to open Nov. 6, 2017, on the northeast corner of Livingston and Immokalee roads in North Naples. (Photo: Courtesy of Oakes Farms)**

Seed to Table will make its own fresh pasta and ice cream and sorbets from scratch, as well as organic breads, pastries and doughnuts made by hand. During the day, there will be different kinds of food creations available.

The store will have a food court and coffee, smoothie, juice and wine bars as well as areas for fresh produce, dairy, meats, bulk food, cheese, flowers, ready-to-go food and a place for demonstrations. In addition to a separate dinner menu upstairs, dining options will be offered downstairs and even outside in a garden setting.

"It's going to be the kind of place where you'll want to hang out," Oakes said.



**Oakes Farms' Seed to Table store will feature a second-story mezzanine with a high-end dinner restaurant and more.** *(Photo: Courtesy of Oakes Farms)*

Of course, that's also going to increase the need for more parking. In addition to trying to find an off-site parking solution for employees, Oakes eventually wants to create additional parking from the outparcel space now leased by a busy Dunkin' Donuts drive-thru.

"The Dunkin' Donuts just doesn't fit in there at all with what we're doing," he said, noting that even the future landscaping will be over the top.

The doughnut franchise relocated in September 2013 from Uptown Center on the south side of Immokalee Road to that spot of Albertsons former convenience store and gas station because of the location's advantage to serve morning commuters. The lease was made with Albertsons, which still owned the property then even though the grocer closed in February 2007 after operating for only a short time. Oakes Farms now owns the entire 7-acre property.

*Have a local question? Email it with your name and city of residence to [intheknow@naplesnews.com](mailto:intheknow@naplesnews.com). Tim Aten's "In the Know" is published every Monday and Wednesday. Like In the Know on Facebook now at*