

A Lotte to Love

A 45,000-square-foot Asian grocery store debuts in Henrico |
Photos by Eileen Mellon

BY EILEEN MELLON MAY 15, 2024

1 of 12



Lotte Plaza Market is located at 7801 W. Broad St. in Henrico.

Grocery store openings tend to be a bit staid, with ribbon cuttings, lots of suits, and perhaps some free swag or specials. But at the May 10 debut of **Lotte Plaza Market** at 7801 W. Broad St., once the scissors sliced through the red ribbon, it was game on as excited customers propelled their metal carts toward the doors — evidence that this was a place people had been yearning for. The former Stein Mart store has been converted into a 45,000-square-foot Asian grocer, a shopping wonderland complete with a food court, forthcoming French-Korean bakery, seafood and meat counters, and home goods section.

“We know that Henrico County is one of the most diverse areas in Central Virginia, and we thought that it’s time for Lotte to come to this market and serve the community here,” says Arvin Lee, current president and second-generation owner.

Open since 1976, Lotte Plaza Market first debuted in Maryland under Lee’s father, Sung Lee. The Richmond location marks the 16th outpost for the East Coast-based company, and the first in the commonwealth outside Northern Virginia. “We’re one of the oldest, if not the oldest, Asian businesses in Maryland, where we started,” Lee adds.

With a sprawling, unparalleled array of items and 14 spacious aisles, it’s been described online as the “Asian Wegmans,” or the Disneyland of Asian grocers. “We have fruits and vegetables from all over the world and all over the United States. You could come here and explore all day, and it wouldn’t be enough,” Lee says.

And he’s not being facetious. While there are everyday items that can be found at other grocers, the store also offers a culinary journey for everyone from curious shoppers to expert cooks, and possibly a trip down memory lane for those longing for certain hard-to-find goods from back home. The store offers Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipino and Taiwanese products, along with a full line of Indian groceries.

In the produce area, shoppers will find everything from Korean melon, Thai guava and durian to a variety of mangoes and coconuts, alongside tindora (aka ivy gourd), giant ginger and enoki mushrooms. Signs distinguish “Western” vegetables from Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese and beyond. There is an entire wall of kimchi, prepared foods such as kimbap (Korean seaweed rice rolls) and stir-fried rice cakes, plenty of fresh noodles, and a wealth of packaged goods.

The seafood market has tanks with live tilapia, blue crabs and lobster. Additional selections include monkfish, croaker, sea bass, red snapper, baby octopus, shad roe and halibut steaks, as well as sashimi (hamachi, salmon and more), uni and a variety of roe. The meat department features an 80-foot display of stocked cuts, along with less common options such as beef kidney and tongue. A dedicated Korean barbecue section showcases marinated, ready-to-cook meats, along with a hot pot section featuring prerolled cuts destined for steaming broth.

“We have, I think, the most amount of hot pot and meat variety in this entire market, from different types of beef to pork to chicken and lamb all thinly sliced; it’s paper thin and rolled, and it’s a very special skill,” Lee says. “As you know, hot pot and shabu-shabu [Japanese hot pot] is a delicacy in all the East Asian countries, China, Korea and Japan, and this is one of our most popular segments.”

Devotees of unique snacks and beverages, consider this your warning: There are munchies and drinks abounding, from canned coffees and boba teas to Japanese baked goods including red bean or brown sugar bread cakes, along with countless chips and candies.

A food court dubbed “Sijang Eatery” will soon be home to four vendors. Currently, only Joen Korean is operating. The remaining

will open.

Lee says the company has steadily been gaining traction. This year, Lotte debuted new Florida outposts in Orlando and Tampa, with stores in Jacksonville and Miami on the horizon. The company's goal is to open 50 Lotte Plaza Market locations by 2030. Lee says they have been eyeing the Richmond region for years, but the development came to fruition about 2 1/2 years ago.

"We have experienced double-digit growth every year for the last 12 years," Lee says. "We think there is a community to be served in this area, and ... we wanted to bring the full product experience in a clean, modern environment to the Richmond community."

Lotte Plaza Market is open from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

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