

Moscow Walmart reopening cheered

Crowd was waiting for doors to open Wednesday

By JOEL MILLS of the Tribune

MOSCOW - If the nearly full parking lot was any indication, Moscow couldn't wait to get its Walmart back.

Hundreds of eager shoppers flooded into the remodeled store for its grand reopening Wednesday, and were able to pluck discounted products from its expanded departments and all-new grocery offerings.

"It's a really nice store," said Ginger Clem of Troy, who was casually pushing a shopping cart through the widened aisles with her husband Dennis. "They put back our material and craft stuff all the older people wanted."

Clem said she was disappointed after the old Moscow Walmart closed in 2010, and a new Walmart in Pullman opened without large bolts of fabric she needs for her sewing projects. But now she is happy, as is husband Dennis.

"I'm just glad they reopened it," he said of the new 118,000-square-foot store at 2470 W. Pullman Road. "It's handy, and I like doing business in Idaho."

Dennis Clem said he's pleased the sales tax added to his Walmart tab will now stay in Latah County.

Local officials are also supportive of the new store, said manager Helena Probasco.

Moscow councilors showed up for the 8 a.m. ribbon cutting, as did representatives from the

local chamber of commerce.

"We've had nothing but a really good reception from everybody," Probasco said.

That wasn't the case in 2005, when Walmart proposed building a 204,000-square-foot super center southeast of the intersection of State Highway 8 and Mountain View Road. That design included a tire and lube center, plus a 10-pump gas station.

A previous city council quickly moved to block the development by passing an emergency "big box" ordinance that required conditional-use permits for buildings larger than 40,000 square feet.

A subsequent council modified that ordinance, however, when the Pullman Walmart opened and took hoards of Latah County shoppers with it. The new ordinance allowed Walmart to expand the old Moscow store by almost 30,000 square feet, rather than build a new super center.

The cost of the remodel was about \$5 million, according to Walmart.

The design and layout of the new store is consistent with new Walmart construction. So are its energy-efficient features and smaller size, Probasco said.

"With the Pullman Walmart being here, there wasn't the need for as much space," she said.

Probasco said that to a certain degree, the store caters to the thousands of college students who live in Moscow, especially in the electronics, furniture and housewares departments.

"We have lots of good opening-price-point merchandise," she said.

The Moscow Walmart is working to be a good community partner, Probasco added. One way is with regular donations to a Moscow food bank of products nearing their expiration date, including items from the bakery, dairy, produce and meat departments. The food is frozen before it expires so it can be safely stored and donated, she said.

The store also presented \$15,000 in grants to local organizations Wednesday morning. The Moscow Volunteer Fire Department received \$5,000, Moscow Parks and Recreation received \$3,000, Backyard Harvest, St. Vincent De Paul Society and Moscow Hope Center received \$2,000, and Trinity Moscow Food Pantry received \$1,000.

The store is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It employs about 220 people, including about 70 who transferred from other Walmarts. They earn an average wage of approximately \$11.90 per hour, according to Walmart officials.

Mills may be contacted at jmills@lmtribune.com or (208) 883-0564.