

## Former Uptown Border's store is under construction, may become health food store Times-Picayune - Online

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Construction is underway at the former Borders bookstore at 3338 St. Charles Avenue, but plans don't appear to be set for the former Borders location on at 3131 Veterans Memorial Blvd. in Metairie. A worker at the Uptown site said it's going to be a "health-food store," with offices upstairs, and should be open in about eight months.

The Times-Picayune Construction is taking place at the former Border's bookstore on St. Charles Avenue. A worker at the site said the building is being converted into a health food store.

In June, Barry Spizer, managing partner for SRSA Commercial Real Estate, told participants in the UNO Economic Outlook and Real Estate Forecast Seminar that it was his understanding that the site was going to be a Fresh Market, a fast-growing upscale grocer from North Carolina.

**Stirling Properties**, which manages and partially owns the site, didn't return a call seeking comment.

A spokeswoman for Fresh Market Inc. said the Greensboro, N.C., company can only discuss sites that have been previously announced on its web site. New Orleans is not among them.

Fresh Market, which has 102 stores in 20 states, made an initial public offering on the stock market in November. The company uses a "small-box" format of less than 21,000 square feet, which it says gives it great flexibility in choosing locations. Fresh Market has opened five new stores this year, according to an investment conference presentation in June, and has signed leases for 11 new stores. It operates in the East, South and Midwest.

Louisiana is not designated as a "pipeline state" for expansion on the investor presentation, but the company has stores in Mandeville, Baton Rouge and Lafayette.

As the name Fresh Market suggests, the retailer focuses on premium products and high-margin perishable foods.

David Livingston, a Wisconsin site consultant who does a lot of work with grocers, said he had heard that the site could become a Trader Joe's, another upscale specialty food retailer with a small footprint, but a Fresh Market would also make sense because it's a high-rent location. "That was just a rumor I heard from a local source," Livingston said. "I do think whoever goes in there is going to be an upscale grocery operator, like a Trader Joe's or a Fresh Market."

Trader Joe's operates in 30 states, and has recently been expanding in the South. It operates in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee, and has recently announced expansions in Texas and Kentucky.

The company has a devoted following and there are Facebook pages for fans who wish to bring Trader Joe's to New Orleans.

Alison Mochizuki, director of public relations at the California company, said Trader Joe's isn't the new tenant at the former uptown Borders site. "At this time, New Orleans is not in our two-year plan of opening a location," Mochizuki said.

Select Properties Ltd., the owner of the 25,000 square-foot former Borders location at the corner intersection of Veterans Memorial Boulevard and Causeway Boulevard in Metairie, still lists the property as being available. Select Properties did not return a phone call inquiring about the status of efforts to fill the building.