

The Big Y picked Lee as the first place for a Big Y Express for many sound reasons.

# Big Y Express is a hit in Lee

By Julie Ruth

LEE — The town of Lee was an obvious choice for supermarket chain Big Y Foods to establish its first-ever fuel and convenience store, the Big Y Express, in December.

"It wasn't: 'Why Lee?' It was: 'Why not Lee?'" said Big Y vice-president of corporate communications Claire D'Amour, who explained that Lee had a host of factors in its favor, starting with its location just off Exit 2 of the Massachusetts Turnpike.

"Major highways are always a draw for a gas station — convenience store," she said.

Lee was also the first pick of Big Y's partner in the endeavor, F.L. Roberts & Co., which already owned the property at 320 Housatonic Street, practically next door to the 51,500-square foot Big Y World Class Market.

"F.L. Roberts had conducted a research study, and they felt Lee was the best place to start," she explained. "The nice thing about its location is its proximity to the Big Y's supermarket, because it allows us to offer Express store customers fresh bagels and donuts baked next door at the supermarket, along with sandwiches, salads and a lot of other food that's freshly prepared fresh."

Big Y is following many major supermarket chains into the convenience store market. "It's not unusual for a supermarket to diversify," D'Amour said. "Other supermarkets don't have partnerships, however; they

typically make convenience stores a division of their business."

Partnering with F.L. Roberts enabled Big Y to enter the fuel-convenience store far more quickly, D'Amour said. "The partnership enabled us to really jump the learning curve — F.L. Roberts already knows how to run a gas station; we're not learning from the ground up. It's a huge advantage."

F.L. Roberts & Co. owns several convenience stores, car washes and truck refueling establishments in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

D'Amour is a member of second generation of the family-owned business, which was founded in 1936 by Paul and Gerald D'Amour. Big Y Foods currently has 61 store locations spread through Massachusetts and Connecticut and more than 10,000 employees.

In its two months of business, the Big Y Express has had already been a big success, D'Amour said. "It has exceeded our expectations, which is a cool thing for all involved."

Big Y has taken a look at additional sites in Berkshire County and beyond for future Express locations, but has no definite plans yet, "Right now we are in a learning process — a lab, if you will — to see what works, and what doesn't. It's much too early to make a decision about a second location."

Big Y plans to go through "a full cycle" in the Berk-

shires in 2014 first.

"The Berkshires are a seasonal market. We want to begin selling more fruit and salad in the summer, for example, and have a great staff willing to test all kinds of things out," D'Amour explained. "I think we're at least a year away from making any kind of announcement about additional locations."

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