



The **Salt**

EATING AND HEALTH

< Salvation Army Opens Its First-Ever Supermarket, In Baltimore

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ARI SHAPIRO, HOST:

City leaders in Baltimore estimate that nearly a quarter of people there lack access to healthy food. Many go to mini-marts for groceries where prices can be high and fresh produce scarce. Now the Salvation Army is trying to fill the gap. The nonprofit is opening its first grocery store in an East Baltimore neighborhood with few other choices. From member station WYPR, Dominique Maria Bonessi reports.

DOMINIQUE MARIA BONESSI, BYLINE: Lawrence Pollard and his wife Faith are shopping at the nonprofit grocery store in East Baltimore for their first time. The store is called DMG Foods. That stands for the Salvation Army's motto - doing the most good.

LAWRENCE POLLARD: So far, so good. It's a clean place.

BONESSI: The 7,000-square-foot space looks like your average grocery store. The couple admires the stacks of fresh-looking asparagus, juicy gala apples and a variety of

lettuce. Lawrence clutches a paper with the store's weekly deals.

L. POLLARD: I see a couple deals already - especially on the fruits and the salads.

BONESSI: Now, many grocery stores boast and brag about having the lowest prices. But the milk, eggs, butter and canned tuna at DMG are 50 cents to \$3 cheaper than the nearest chain grocery store.

GENE HOGG: Our business is not really selling food.

BONESSI: That's Major Gene Hogg, the Salvation Army's commander in central Maryland. While the store caters to beneficiaries of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, he says anyone can shop here.

HOGG: What we're in the business of doing is helping and loving people. And the qualifications to shop here is to walk in the door.

BONESSI: Some of the nonperishable food is donated by Maryland's Food Bank while produce is bought from a large distributor. Since they opened a couple weeks ago, Hogg says business so far is good.

HOGG: There's room that we have to grow and because - what I've learned in the grocery store business - that margin is about how many people actually come out and shop.

BONESSI: The store has already met its goal - averaging 300 paying customers per day. Hogg says to entice more customers each week, there are free items for SNAP beneficiaries. This week the store is giving out 10-pound bags of chicken. Hogg says if the store makes enough profit, proceeds can go to Salvation Army's home for survivors of human trafficking.

HOGG: So not only are you just coming and shopping and meeting your needs for your household, but you actually in the end could be helping someone who's been rescued from human trafficking.

BONESSI: Over at the cash register, Lawrence and Faith Pollard are ready to check out. They leave the store clutching three full grocery bags. They've only spent about \$17, and Faith examines her receipt with a smile.

FAITH POLLARD: I can't wait to come back to see if we get a free chicken.

BONESSI: If this nonprofit model is successful, Hogg says the Salvation Army may be able to expand to other parts of Baltimore. And if that works out, they hope to open in more areas across the country. For NPR News, I'm Dominique Maria Bonessi in Baltimore.

(SOUNDBITE OF ATMOSPHERE SONG, "I LOVE YOU LIKE A BROTHER")

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