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## Kwik Shops to try expanded stores

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Construction has begun on two pilot Kwik Shop expansions in northwest Wichita, as the division of Kroger targets underserved food and prescription niches in its battle with QuikTrip for convenience store market share.

Expanded stores at 53rd North and Maize Road and 37th North and Ridge Road should be open sometime in May, said Kwik Shop president Jeff Parker.

Kwik Shop, based in Hutchinson, will add deli space to offer more prepared foods, expanding its response to QuikTrip's venture into fresh foods. It also will offer a pharmacy staffed by Kroger's Dillons division.

"We think the two services kind of go together," Parker said. "We try to be convenient for the customer and what they need, whether that be a rotisserie chicken or a prescription."

Quik Trip spokesman Mike Thornbrugh said pharmacies "aren't even on our radar right now."

"We've talked about it, but right now there's nothing like that coming," he said.

However, the Tulsa-based chain will wage the prepared-foods market share battle with Kwik Shop, Thornbrugh said.

"We've made no secret that we're going to add an arrow to our quiver in that we're committed to the fresh food offering," he said. "Well, what constitutes fresh food? Ultimately, it could be anything."

The expanded food offerings are next, Thornbrugh said, with the company's infrastructure complete for its daily fresh food deliveries to stores — commissaries, bakeries, staff, delivery systems.

Quik Trip also is expanding its Wichita locations, building bigger stores with more gas pumps.

The Kwik Shop expansions are driven by the success of a similar layout in Florida, in Kroger's Tom Thumb division, Parker said.

The 4,000-square-foot stores will expand by more than 2,000 square feet, with work on the north and south sides. Employment will rise significantly, Parker said, with five to 10 more workers. Wichita's Conco Construction is the contractor. The work includes expanded driveways to allow drive-through service and easier customer access to the store.

The Florida Tom Thumb store "has been a definite success," Parker said, and if Wichitans buy into the expanded convenience concept, other bigger Kwik Shops are possible.

"We do have Dillons pharmacies throughout Wichita," he said. "This kind of helps to fill in in spots where customers might not have easy access to a pharmacy."

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