

WAITING for the FIVE & DIME



Photos by Julie Graber/The New Mexican

Teresa Hernandez, a Woolworth's worker for 44 years, stocks the shelves of the new Five & Dime General Store Thursday morning. Hernandez is responsible for bringing the Frito pie to Woolworth's, and she is eager to serve the creation at the new store.

The general store replacing the closed Woolworth's on the Plaza opens its doors Saturday

BOB QUICK
The New Mexican

Nancy Phieler just couldn't wait any longer for the new Five & Dime General Store on the Plaza to open for business — Thursday morning she walked in and started trying on straw hats.

Phieler, who lives part time in Santa Fe and part time in New Jersey, used to shop at Woolworth's and was eager for its replacement to get down to business.

"You never know what you're going to find," she said. "And you can always get something to eat here."

Unfortunately Phieler couldn't buy that hat — she will have to wait for Saturday, when the store is finally expected to open. There have been some delays in obtaining necessary state and city permits.

Five & Dime, which occupies about one-third of the old Woolworth space, is at 58 E. San Francisco St. It is locally owned and operated, and all of the store's employees formerly worked at Woolworth's, which closed last October.

Those workers include Mike Collins, the former manager of the Santa Fe Woolworth's, who manages Five & Dime, and Teresa Hernandez, the woman credited with developing the Frito pie, a Woolworth's specialty. Both Collins and Hernandez are partners in the store.

Collins said he "zeroed in on" the items that sold the best at the old Woolworth's in deciding what merchandise to carry in Five & Dime. That means there's everything from T-shirts to toothpaste, from Snickers to hot dogs, from lightbulbs to rubber thongs — but no bicycles or appliances or pots and pans.

Prices, for the most part, are lower at Five & Dime than at Woolworth's, he said.

"We're selling at T-shirt for \$6.99 that used to cost \$9.99 before," Collins said. "The jumbo Frito pie is \$3.50 now. It used to cost \$4 at Woolworth's."

Collins said previously he expects Five & Dime to have annual sales of about \$1 million, about one-third of those at Woolworth's.

Among those who will be working in Five & Dime's snack bar are Vickie Garcia and Lorraine Chavez. Both women were busy shining up their new work place Thursday, including three tables and six stools. The stools are true relics from the old Woolworth store that Collins salvaged.



Nancy Phieler of Santa Fe peeks in the door of the Five & Dime to see what is for sale.

"We're all excited about" the new store, Garcia said. "We all helped to set it up. We're hoping that it will open today."

Chavez added: "I think it will be a good success. We're all looking forward to it."

Hernandez, who worked for Woolworth's for 44 years before retiring, was working part time at the old Woolworth's before it closed. Since then she's been on vacation and waiting for the Five & Dime to open.

"This is about the size Woolworth's was when I started working here in 1953," she said. "It's in the same location too."

Even as workers Thursday inside the store touched up the paint and employees stocked the shelves, the curious looked in the front doors and windows trying to see what was inside.

One French-speaking couple asked in a combination of English and French if the store would open Thursday but turned away disappointed when told it wouldn't.

Santa Fe native Raul Ortiz said he, too, was anxious for the new store to open.

"There's nothing else in town," he said. "We still miss the Walgreen's that used to be down the street. It had things that met your daily needs, especially for people employed in the downtown area."

Other partners in Five & Dime are Earl and Debra Potter and their son Cody Potter; Mary Lee Potter Colin; Rick Brenner; Bar-

bara and Ron Balsler; Valerie and Charles Diker; and Rob Higgins, a jeweler who sells his works in front of the new store.

"I'm thrilled it's opening now," said Colin. "I certainly have had a lot of people in the community asking me, 'When is it opening? When is it opening?' I'm almost through getting that question."

Winifred Braden, an Arizona resident, has owned the property where Five & Dime is located since the 1950s and was instrumental in helping the store get on its feet. She agreed to accept below-market rent for the property. She also signed a 35-year lease with the store.

Santa Fe art dealer Gerald Peters owns the other two-thirds of the former Woolworth's. His plan to renovate the space, making it suitable for a variety of retail tenants, restaurants and three residences, is being considered by the city's Historic Design Review Board.

Peters has said he wants to lease the space to tenants who will serve local needs and be oriented to pedestrian traffic.

The Five & Dime General Store will hold a grand opening May 16 and 17. There will be live music and a drawing for a \$200 Community Bank savings bond, plus drawings for cases of Coke.

The store's hours will be from 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday. Summer hours will be longer.