



KATE SPIRGEN/SUN NEWS

Nature's Bin shoppers check out the produce and natural products under the store's new energy-efficient lighting.

Bad economy good for Nature's Bin

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Business is booming at Nature's Bin despite the tough economic times. The store, operated by nonprofit organization Cornucopia Inc., has seen sales increases for the last three years, nearly 30 percent in 2008 alone.

Executive Director Scott Duennes credits the store's staff, fresh produce and all-natural products with the recent success.

"We really try to stay current on the new vitamins and health and beauty aids that are coming out with all natural and no-preservative products," he said. "Once that expanded, that's when we've really seen the growth."

In the last year, Nature's Bin generated 74 percent of all revenue for Cornucopia Inc., which helps people with disabilities develop their skills, confidence and workplace potential through hands-on experience.

Today, the store is 93 percent self-suf-

ficient, with 7 percent of its income coming from donations and grants that provide for various improvements and equipment.

"In a very struggling economy, there are a lot of nonprofits that haven't been as fortunate as we have," Duennes said.

The store's focus on a variety of fresh products including produce, prepared foods, vitamins, beverages and health and beauty products have lent it a unique niche in the superstore market.

"People don't have the time or the money to go out to eat as much," Duennes said. "What we're seeing is a lot more customers who are in here two, three, four times a week and basically they're shopping for dinner and picking up whatever else they might need while they're here."

Nature's Bin strives to keep its foods local to improve its carbon footprint, another selling point for the store. In the past year, produce from local farmers at Greenfield Farms and the Mt. Hope Produce Auction in Holmes County made its

way onto the stands. Even in the winter months, the store carries local sauces, breads, pastas, cheeses and candies.

Staff education is also a large factor in the store's operations and by specializing in hard-to-find products like gluten-free foods, wheat-free bakery and others, the store has created a loyal following.

"We have a very high staff retention rate," said Mary Johnson, director of development and marketing. "The staff participates in a lot of continuing education so that they can learn about the products we're selling and they're able to interact intelligently with the customers."

The future looks bright for the store as well. Due to the uncertain economy, the stores budgeted for a modest 5 percent increase this year and after five months, has already hit it. Thanks to this success, the store has been able to reinvest in capital improvements, keep staff compensation competitive and save cash reserve for a rainy day.