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Walmart distribution celebrates 30th anniversary milestone

By Dalondo Moultrie The Herald-Zeitung
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Tim Cooper, senior vice president, speaks during Walmart Distribution Center's 30th Anniversary Celebration on Tuesday, Sept. 18, 2018.

Mikala Compton

It took community involvement to bring the company to town, and the community got involved Tuesday morning to help the Walmart distribution center celebrate 30 years in the New Braunfels area.

City leaders foresaw the value the box chain's warehouse could provide New Braunfels and acted to help the company land in Comal County just outside the city limits, Mayor Barron Casteel said. The Greater New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce and concerned citizens

pitched in \$300,000 to lower the cost for the property where the distribution center exists today, and the local school district also provided tax incentives, he said.

“Even with those tax incentives, Walmart became the largest taxpayer to the city the day that it opened,” Casteel said. “The minute they opened ... they became the largest taxpayer, the city’s largest taxpayer and the county’s.”

A host of Walmart executives joined with more than 300 other employees for a pep rally of sorts on the distribution center’s floor to celebrate its 30 years in existence here. In those 30 years, the center has serviced 121 stores, expanded to 1.285 million square feet, begun to ship between 1.5 and 1.8 million cases of goods weekly and more.

Through it all, the company has weathered storms, and now might be in the most interesting era for the retail industry, said Greg Smith, executive vice president of Walmart’s United States supply chain.

“What’s more remarkable is 44 of you have been here since day one,” he said. “Thank you for everything you do and have done. It’s a pleasure being here, and congratulations on 30 years.”

Back when he was 18 years old and looking for work, Ricky Aguirre of New Braunfels had settled on choosing between two options.

On the one hand, there was the well-known Mission Valley Mills, which once was the largest employer in town and had been giving jobs to New Braunfelsers for generations. Or he could go to the upstart Walmart distribution center that was moving into the area, Aguirre said.

“I had never heard of Walmart,” said Aguirre, who celebrated 30 years at the facility on Tuesday. “I went that direction, and I’ve been here ever since.”

A short time later, he told his high school sweetheart about the place and she applied. She got a job and will have worked 29 years at the distribution center in March, said Nelly Aguirre, Ricky’s wife.

Signing up for the gig and sticking around was a great idea, she said.

“They gave a lot of incentives for associates,” Nelly said. “There was profit sharing, good benefits for employees. I wanted a good job and I’ve been here 28 1/2 years.”

Ricky said another reason for sticking around is all of the good the company does in the community. He said Walmart encourages employees to participate in philanthropic endeavors and to give of their time.

Walmart is always giving, Ricky said.

“We read with children and stuff,” he said. “We clean up the river. You’re giving back to the community as well as working.

“Where do you find a job when you’re giving back and working?” he said. “You’re killing two birds with one stone.”

Various company executives touted employees’ community engagement in the community. Associates have donated and helped Walmart give more than \$446,000 in community grants within the past 10 years, they said.

They thanked some of the community partners who have helped to spread around that largess benefiting so many sectors of the New Braunfels community. Organizations like Court Appointed Special Advocates of Central Texas, Communities in Schools, the United Way and the Children’s Advocacy Center of Comal County were mentioned by name.

“Year after year, the CACCC has been able to keep helping children recover from abuse because of great organizations like Walmart distribution center,” said Trendy Sharp, CACCC executive director. “Walmart distribution has been a sponsor of the 5K (Mardi Gras Run fundraiser) every year since 2007. They’ve shown 30 years of community responsibility and generosity. Congrats!”