

## **Center's owner wants a grocery store Another food store is at the top of Rappaport Cos. list to fill space left by Winn-Dixie**

**By Wesley Young**

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### **WALKERTOWN**

**The owner of Centre Stage Shopping Center said last week that he is talking with grocery-store operators to replace the Winn-Dixie store that anchored one end of the shopping center.**

**Gary Rappaport, the president and founder of The Rappaport Cos., declined to say which store might move into vacant space at the shopping center, but that it will likely be a grocery store and not some other type of business.**

**"We are discussing the location with other possible grocery tenants," Rappaport said. "One of the grocery tenants on our preliminary list has been Food Lion, but they are not the only ones."**

**The talk around town has been that the Winn-Dixie site could be leased to a tenant that would run some other type of business. That would leave the town with only one supermarket. But Rappaport said he is not aware of any nongrocer client.**

**"I haven't had any calls from any retailers for the site and will not be marketing the site to any nongrocery type of tenant, unless we find out that there is no grocery tenant interested in the site," Rappaport said.**

**For a while, shoppers in the Walkertown area had two grocery stores. Winn-Dixie had been there for years, and Lowes Foods moved into the Walkertown Commons Shopping Center in 2004.**

**A year later, Winn-Dixie announced that it was closing the Walkertown store as the chain withdrew from North Carolina and South Carolina as part of a post-bankruptcy restructuring.**

**At the time, Winn-Dixie officials said they hoped to turn the store over to another chain.**

**Rappaport said that it is possible that other improvements to the shopping center could follow if a new grocer is found.**

**"What we first have to bring back to the center is a tenant to bring back that space," he said. "That is what we are focusing on. Hopefully, by bringing in a stronger food tenant, it will give us an opportunity to upgrade the mix as well, but we don't have any specific plans to do anything other than to find the right tenant."**

**Marilyn Martin, who sits on a town committee that is developing a land-use**

plan, said that keeping the shopping center viable is important.

"You want to keep things looking good," she said. "With the development coming along in Walkertown, we could support two grocery stores, and I think it would be good for Walkertown to have another grocery store."

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