

Grocery store in food desert snags real estate award

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DALLAS (BP)—When Cornerstone Baptist Church began developing a grocery store in a South Dallas food desert, a local college professor railed that a store without beer, wine, lottery tickets or cigarettes wouldn't attract clientele, Pastor Chris Simmons recalled.

Since it opened last year, business at Southpoint Community Market has increased by 600 percent.



Pastor Chris Simmons of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Dallas inspects the fresh vegetables and fruit for sale at Southpoint Community Market. (Photo / Ken Camp)

The professor's assessment proved only an insult. Southpoint Community Market, offering fresh meats, vegetables and other items to residents at deep discounts, captured the *Dallas Business Journal's* award for "Best Real Estate Deals of 2021: Neighborhood Impact."

"It is an effort, because we are in a food desert, to bring fresh and affordable items to the neighborhood so that individuals don't have to pay a \$5- to \$6- bus ride to get some of their basic essentials," Simmons said.

"It's been a great success. We've seen a 600 percent increase since we opened. The community is really responding."

Dallas Business Journal honored the market April 21, choosing it over finalists the City of Dallas Fire Station #6 and The Pocket Sandwich Theatre.

“Located at 2839 S. Ervay St., Southpoint Community Market is a nearly 1,300-square-feet store providing access to affordable and healthy food for residents in the area,” the *Dallas Business Journal* wrote in announcing the award. “In its first month, the store made about \$2,500 in revenue, and last month, the store generated about \$14,000.”

In addition to Simmons, Cornerstone Community Development Corporation Program Director Donald Wesson, The Real Estate Council’s Associate Leadership Council Class of 2020 and TREC Community Investors including Mike Galindo, Jacob Prince and Matt Ballard are identified as key players in the real estate deal.

Funding the deal was a \$78,000 grant from TREC Community Investors and \$273,000 in in-kind and pro-bono services secured by the Associate Leadership Council class.

“One thing we were able to do is get a donor who was able to help us, and so we’re able to bring some of the items that they’re not able to get on the EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer card) down to affordable prices,” Simmons said.

The developer “is able to go to the dollar store and get paper towels, toilet paper, and then we charge half of what he pays for it. They all pay something, because we want them to have the dignity of paying something, but they don’t pay the full price.”



Pastor Chris Simmons of
Cornerstone Baptist Church in

Dallas sees the Southpoint Community Market not only as a means to community development, but also as an opportunity for gospel witness. (Photo / Ken Camp)

The market is one of many outreach ministries of Cornerstone Baptist Church and the Cornerstone Community Development Corporation to serve the community, including a kitchen, a medical clinic, a laundromat, a clothes closet, a shower room and other services.

“Our vision was to bring 7-11 convenience at a Walmart price, so individuals could still affordably shop in their neighborhood,” the *Dallas Business Journal* quoted Simmons. “We discovered that we’re in a poor community, but people have access to funds and will spend money if you provide the items that they need and want, so that’s been very encouraging.”

The market is open six days a week including Sundays and employs one fulltime and three part-time workers. Wesson and church volunteers also staff the market. Local business owners can sell their items there.

“We began working with (local entrepreneurs) to develop a partnership where we could bring them on and bring their products into the store that would create job opportunities for those in the neighborhood,” Simmons told the journal.

“It has been a good fit for us. We’re looking to expand and provide an avenue where we can help those entrepreneurs expand their business model.”

For the past 30 years, the *Dallas Business Journal* has honored through its Best Real Estate Awards the stakeholders and dealmakers of the most

noteworthy real estate projects in Dallas-Fort Worth that were initiated, active or completed in 2021, the journal said in promoting the recognitions. The journal has honored more than 500 projects since the award's inception.