

Food Lion buys all Bi-Lo stores

THE JOURNAL STAFF

SENECA — The last Bi-Lo grocery store in Oconee County will become a Food Lion early next year.

Food Lion, which currently operates one store between Seneca and Clemson, announced Wednesday plans with Bi-Lo's parent company to purchase 62 stores across Georgia and the Caroli-

nas. Southeastern Grocers (SEG), which operates Bi-Lo, said the strategic move allows it to focus on expansion of its Fresco y Más, Harveys Supermarket and Winn-Dixie banners. Bi-Lo closed the doors on two of its area stores in April 2018, leaving only the store at Bi-Lo Place in Seneca.

The purchase agree-

SEE BI-LO, PAGE A5

ion early next year

FROM PAGE A1

ment includes 46 Bi-Lo stores and 16 Harveys Supermarkets, which will remain open under the same name until the transition begins in January 2021. The new name and marketing will roll out in a staggered fashion, with all 62 stores operating under the Food Lion name by April 2021.

"We are so excited to add these new locations to our more than 630 stores across Georgia and the Carolinas," Food Lion president Meg Ham said. "We've been serving customers in these larger regions for almost 60 years. We're thrilled to add these locations and serve even more towns and cities across these three states with fresh, quality products at affordable prices every day with the caring, friendly service customers expect from their local Food Lion."

SEG secured an agreement with its distributor in Mauldin to continue supplying the transitioning stores.

Food Lion expects to hire more than 4,650 associates at the stores, and current Bi-Lo employees are invited to apply.

"We are always looking for exceptional retail associates and welcome any of

these associates to apply for Food Lion positions for which they qualify," Food Lion external communications manager Matt Harakal said.

SEG does not give out employment numbers per company policy, corporate communications senior manager Joe Caldwell said.

"Any associates who are affected by this decision will be treated with the utmost care and respect and will receive the appropriate support throughout this transition," Caldwell said. "Pending regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions, we will actively collabo-

rate and coordinate with the purchasing organization in the interviewing and hiring of associates from acquired stores."

It wasn't clear if the Food Lion hires would be an increase or decrease in workforce.

NO PHARMACIES PLANNED

Food Lion does not plan to operate pharmacies in any of its stores, a representative said, and SEG announced its current pharmacies at Bi-Lo and Harveys Supermarket stores will be phasing into the control of CVS and Walgreens.

"The successful execution of our long-term transformation strategy may, at times, require difficult decisions," SEG president and CEO Anthony Hucker said. "Today's transactions are a critical strategic move and an important next step for our continued growth and broader evolution as a business. These actions will facilitate greater investment in our remaining footprint so we can continue to provide an exceptional shopping experience our customers can always count on."