



HOSPITALITY & RETAIL

Retailing

SoMa grocery's new valet service shows challenges of bringing food store to Transbay

By Katie Burke

There was plenty of buzz around the opening of Rincon Hill's first full-service grocery store, but for shoppers, finding a place to park has been an uphill battle.

More than six months after [Woodlands Market](#) opened a new location at the bottom of Tishman Speyer's Lumina condo tower, the Marin-based grocer has rolled out a free valet service to serve customers turned away by the store's parking challenges. The parking service is also expected to help attract customers from other parts of the city.

[Don Santa](#), Woodlands Market's founder, said the store at 333 Beale St. has gotten plenty of foot traffic since the location opened last August. However, for customers from other neighborhoods or those that need to haul heavier items home, it's a different story.

Up until now, the average 1,500 to 2,000 people that shop at Woodlands each day have



Woodlands Market, a Marin-based grocer, opened location at the Lumina tower at 201 Folsom Street last year. It recently rolled out valet service to help deal with the area's parking shortage.

WOODLANDS MARKET

had to hunt for parking meters or pay for a nearby garage space. With the valet option — a service that was included in the grocer's lease with Tishman Speyer — 25 spaces have been set aside in the Lumina parking garage for customers' first hour of shopping.

Tishman Speyer is fronting the cost of the valet service for those initial 25 spaces. Woodlands will be responsible for paying for additional customers.

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Santa said he's hoping to pull in an additional 200 to 300 customers a day now that valet service has been implemented, which would equate to a 10 to 15 percent boost in business.

"Valet was a key part of the decision to go there," the founder said of opening Woodlands' first San Francisco location. "It's an added benefit to those that already come in the door, but it also provides an opportunity for those that aren't immediately in the market area."

Woodlands' valet service spells trouble for Transbay's plans to attract a full-service grocery operator.

The transit center – which has been plagued with construction delays – has more than 100,000 square feet of retail to fill once completed. Since it was appointed to help fill it, [Colliers kicked off the formal leasing process last year](#), but a majority of the activity has been concentrated among restaurant uses.

According to a [retail update](#) at a Transbay Joint Powers Authority board meeting, Colliers' leasing team reported five dead grocery deals, three idle ones and three still in the running.

Over at Related California's 55-story mixed-income residential tower at 420-488 Folsom St., the project has yet to land a grocery

tenant for its 17,000-square-foot space on the ground level.

Related Vice President [Jonathan Shum](#) said in an email that city code requires one parking spot per 1,500 square foot of retail, which would mean as few as 11 spaces for customers of any future grocery tenant.

Retail West Principal [Matthew Holmes](#) has previously said that parking is one of many obstacles facing the Transbay area's ability to attract new retail tenants. And he knows the area well, since Holmes was the broker for Woodlands responsible inking the deal with Tishman Speyer.

"Transbay is a retail disaster," Holmes said of the area's small streets, lack of loading areas, homeless population and severe parking shortage. "It is a highly challenged retail location."

So what does that mean for SoMa's ability to attract future grocers? Woodlands' Santa said that while he's thankful he was able to land a deal that includes a solution to the area's parking woes, he isn't so sure about others' ability to do the same.

"We got a super sweet deal that works well for both parties," Santa said of his lease with Tishman Speyer. "We were able to connect all of those dots for ourselves, but I'm not sure it will be readily available for most others."