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Grocery co-op targets '07 for Medford store

By Meg Landers

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Medford's new food co-op took the plunge Tuesday to set up in the old Hubbard's Ace Hardware building downtown, with hopes of bringing locally grown and organic food to Medford by fall 2007.

Velda Welch, board president of the Medford Market, signed a lease with Bob Seus, who, with his four siblings, Mark, Dan, Paul and Leslie, owns the building on the northwest corner of Main Street and Riverside Avenue.

The co-op now will kick off a large capital campaign. Welch said the organization needs to raise \$1.8 million to \$2 million to open its doors. Welch said the co-op has raised more than \$30,000 in memberships but will continue to encourage people to become members. It has also secured bank loans and expects to receive grants.

Though neither Seus nor Welch would disclose the price to rent the space, Erik Wallbank, board president of the Ashland Food Co-op and project manager for the Medford store, said it was an amount the store could live with.

"For the natural food industry it's a very good deal," he said.

The building has 8,000 square feet on the first floor and 9,000 square feet in the basement. Because it has an open floor plan, demolition within the former hardware store will be minimal.

Seus is renovating the exterior of the building over the next few months, with the assistance from the Medford Urban Renewal Agency's façade improvement program.

The Medford Market will offer a variety of products with an emphasis on natural, organic and locally produced food. The store will also feature a deli and will offer community cooking classes in the basement. Co-op customers won't be required to have memberships.

Shares in the Medford Market are available for \$100 and may be purchased by individuals, spouses or partners, but no more than two people can purchase shares jointly. Individuals or couples may purchase 1 to 20 shares. Shares can be applied toward membership dues when the store opens.

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