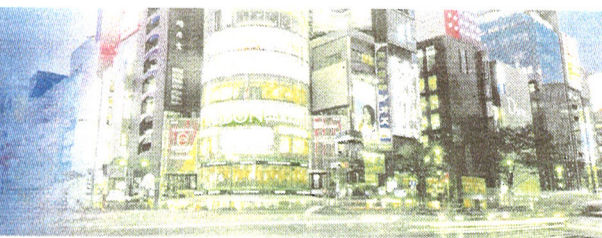


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DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

Walmart's been a boon to Chicago

I understand a study on the economic impact of Chicago's first Walmart store, which opened in 2006, has been garnering some attention in New York City.

Those opposed to letting Walmart open its first store in New York City have been holding up a skeptical report, released in 2009 by the University of Illinois at Chicago Prof. David Merriman and Loyola University, as supposed proof that Walmart hasn't increased retail or job opportunities in my city.

As an elected official who has long championed expanded economic development opportunities in diverse, underserved urban communities, I feel compelled to set the record straight.

Walmart has been a boon to my constituents on the far West Side of Chicago. The change is obvious. No academic research, especially not a flawed research report, will convince me otherwise.

I'm not an economist, but I know that Me-nards. Food4Less. Aldi. CVS. Burlington Coat Factory. Chase and Bank of America are just a few of the companies that have opened new businesses within a half-mile of the new Walmart — all since Walmart opened four years ago.

That means hundreds if not thousands of Chicago residents on the West Side are now able to work and shop in their own neighborhood. In these tough economic times, that is saying quite a lot.

I'm not a real estate expert, but I know that if a store that closes on the near South Side — 4 miles away from the Walmart — it might be closing because of the difficult economy, poor management or even perhaps because of new competition nearby. It is simply dishonest to suggest, as the study does, that virtually every store going out of business in a densely populated, urban area can be blamed on one Walmart.

I'm not a statistician, but I know that if you are doing a study on the net loss of jobs in a city, one should add new jobs created and subtract jobs lost. Yet according to Mari Gallagher & Associates, a well-known research firm special-

BE OUR GUEST

BY EMMA MITTS

izing in strategies to get high-quality food to low-income neighborhoods, "In reviewing Loyola's 2009 report, we find their methods and conclusions flawed. One problem is that the Loyola calculation includes all competing jobs lost but excludes all competing jobs gained."

I believe in things that you can see, touch and feel. Anyone who visits my ward can see how new retailers have risen from vacant lots and abandoned manufacturing facilities, bringing jobs for real Chicago residents and a tangible sense of renewed hope to my community. In addition, Walmart has already generated more than \$20 million in new tax revenue for Chicago, our county and our public transportation authority.

Indeed, the Merriman study itself gives a clue about the overall validity of its findings. It contains a disclaimer that the data con-

tained in the report is uncertain. No wonder the Chicago Sun-Times wrote in a June 2010 editorial, "Though pegged as the first

**An alderwoman
says she's seen it
with her own eyes**

urban analysis of impact on local businesses and jobs, the study turns out to be little more than a cheap shot at Walmart. The underlying data are weak, even if the researchers' forceful conclusions are not. In other words, their conclusions are no conclusions at all."

There is a growing sense of despair and desperation in many urban neighborhoods. People are looking to elected leadership for realistic solutions, not knee-jerk ideological conclusions.

I invite New York City's elected officials to come to Chicago and see what is happening in my community. I further urge them to encourage and support new business entry into underserved communities, rather than attacking a retailer willing to invest in those families, neighborhoods and entire communities virtually ignored by everyone.

Mitts, a Democrat, is a Chicago alderwoman who has represented the northwest side of Chicago for the past 11 years.