



New Jersey has 3,229 convenience stores, and more are on the way

Olivia Rizzo | NJ Advance Media, August 3, 2018

We've all been there. It's the first stop you make on a road trip to grab snacks and drinks. Or you stop on your way to work when you realize you need gas, and decide you might as well buy a coffee since you're already there.

Convenience stores are a one stop shop for a lot of stuff, and we apparently can't get enough. New Jersey has 3,229 of them -- and counting -- according to Jeff Lenard, the vice president of the National Association of Convenience Stores.

Convenience store, or c-stores as they are called in the industry, have been through multiple adaptations since they first began. The stores can trace their roots to Texas in 1927, when the Southland Ice Company began selling bread, milk and eggs after the regular grocery stores closed at 5 p.m.

The company realized that working folks had a need to pick up some essential items on the way home. Southland Ice Co. would go on to spread their stores across the country, and become 7-Eleven.

Today, convenience stores are all about getting you in and out of the store as quickly as possible.

"It's now a fast experience. On the average, it takes three to four minutes from when you leave your car to when you're back in the car," said Lenard. That's thanks in large part to the ability for self-service.

"Stores are heavily geared towards self-service," said Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, C-Store, and Automotive Association.

"You get your own coffee, your own hot dog, your own drinks."

In most convenience stores, there is no interaction with employees until you put your items down at the register -- and even less if a store offers mobile ordering through an app.

Risalvato expects that technology will continue to play a huge role in how convenience stores operate.

“Frictionless payment is on it’s way. You’ll sign up for the store card and it will track when you enter a store, what you pick up and will charge your card automatically. You don’t even go to the cash register,” Risalvato said.

Commuters, experts say, are the driving force behind the stores’ success. About 86 percent of people commute to work by driving, said Lenard. Those drivers need gas and where there is gas, there is also a convenience store.

But that’s not to say that the convenience store industry is going to stick to what it knows is safe. Wawa hoagies and coffee, for example, [are now coming to your doorstep](#).

“We will find you if you need us,” Lenard said, “It’s basically a technologically advanced version of the pizza delivery guy.”

Convenience stores average 11,000 customers per day in the Garden State with the average person making a trip to a convenience store about every three days, according to Lenard.

Given the demand, some of Jersey's most popular brands have expanded, and are planning to open even more locations.

Wawa

A favorite among those in the southern half of the state especially, Wawa has become well known for its hoagies, and easy-to-use tablets to order freshly-prepared food.

Wawa currently has over 800 stores across across Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Florida. The company is still expanding, with three stores expected to open in New Jersey this fall, two in Cinnaminson and one in Piscataway.

[Reports](#) say that Wawa plans to open 25 stores in 2018 in the Mid-Atlantic market, and remodel 75 older stores, with each new store creating anywhere from 35 to 40 new positions.

QuickChek

QuickChek has opened 21 new store locations and has hired an additional 1,000 employees across the country since 2015.

The company has opened four new stores nationwide in the first six months of 2018, with the most recent being in Hackensack on June 26. QuickChek plans to continue to grow with the opening of future locations planned in Frankford, Manalapan, North Plainfield, Raritan, Robbinsville and Woodbridge, according to Russ Mensch, a spokesman for the brand.

Heritage's Dairy

Heritage's Dairy began during the Great Depression when its founder Harold H. Heritage, also known as Grandpa Skeets, sold milk in the Thorofare and Woodbury areas of New Jersey. Grandpa Skeets went on to create a home delivery dairy service.

This later developed to the Heritage stores we know today, after Grandpa Skeets' son opened the family's first convenience store in 1957 in Westville, according to the company's website.

Currently Heritage has 33 stores total. There are 24 stores in Gloucester County, five in Camden, two in Salem, and one store each in Cumberland and Cape May counties, according to Skeeter Heritage Jr. Operations Manager. It does not have any new stores in the works at the moment.

7-Eleven

The company has 371 store locations in the Garden State, which are all owned by individual franchisees.

In addition to gifting us with the first c-store, 7-Eleven's [signature Slurpee](#) is a summer favorite for many.

Royal Farms

Royal Farms is a Baltimore-based franchise, that has been [quickly spreading into Jersey](#). It features the standard C-Store fare, and the chain's signature fried chicken.

The store has opened four locations in New Jersey so far, and six more are either in the planning stage or under construction, according to the company and public records.

Some of the new locations include Evesham, Moorestown, Mount Laurel and Winslow.

Royal Farms has more than 200 existing locations, mostly in the mid-Atlantic.

The company's latest promotion, Chicken Palooza, features free chicken for a year for four grand prize winners. The contest runs through the end of August.

Stores offer indoor and outdoor seating areas and standard convenience items like soda, milk and water. It also features its own line of snack items, such as Chesapeake-flavored potato chips, nuts and fresh-baked items.