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## Rockford's Ellis Heights' Save-A-Lot store ends food desert

ROCKFORD — Catherine Kelley says her job at the new Save-A-Lot on Rockford's west side means more to her than any of her previous jobs.

The 33-year-old, who was one of [about 30 people hired from the Ellis Heights neighborhood](#), has lived in the neighborhood her whole life and has never known the area to have a grocery store. Kelley said the job will improve her quality of life and provide her community with fresh produce and meats, for the first time in 35 years.

“The store is going to bring light to our neighborhood community on the west side,” she said. “This is a big change, and we've needed that.”

Before today's Save-A-Lot grand opening at West State Street and Central Avenue, the Ellis Heights area was considered to be a [food desert](#). The nearest grocery was more than a mile outside the neighborhood, limiting food options for families without cars. Kelley said she often shopped for groceries at convenient stores within walking distance.

The Save-A-Lot was [developed in conjunction with Chicago-based nonprofit IFF](#) and the city of Rockford; the project fits into the \$20 million redevelopment of West State Street. Joe Neri, CEO of IFF, said that the project was one of IFF's biggest to date.

“While this is not our first project in Rockford it is certainly one of our most important — one of our most important (projects) across the entire Midwest, even,” he said. “This is ending a food desert that has lasted a generation.”

State Rep. Litesa Wallace, D-Rockford, said she's delighted to see area residents working in the store.

“For too long this area has been neglected. You hear 35 years and realize some of us aren't even 35 years old,” she said. “This is so important to be able to provide a nutritious outlet for children ... and jobs for the residents of the community.”

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Racheal Charles, 30, helps a customer check out Thursday, Aug. 27, 2015, during the grand opening of the Save-A-Lot store at West State Street and Central Avenue in Rockford. Charles has lived in the Ellis Heights area her whole life and was one of about 30 residents to be hired at the store. SUNNY STRADER/RRSTAR.COM

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