

Transforming Errands Into Engaging Experiences

Dash In debuts an all-new, large-format store that emphasizes personal connection By Danielle Romano



Photos by John Magor Photography

Dash In spent three years developing a reimagined brand experience.

At a Glance Dash In

Location: 12441 Hull Street Road, Midlothian, Va.

Size: 5,600 square feet

Unique features: An assortment of local products prominently displayed, elevated fresh-food options, and a new growler and crowler craft beer program

AFTER THREE YEARS OF COLLABORATING with its design and construction partners to develop a reimagined brand experience, Dash In unveiled the fruits of its labor with an all-new, large-format “neighborhood concept store” in Chesterfield County, Va., that prominently showcases local products and the retailer’s elevated fresh food and beer/wine offering.

“[This store] achieves what we’re trying to do at Dash In. Other c-stores focus on transactions associated with normal customer pit stops, but for us and our mantra, we want to make time more rewarding for people by emphasizing a sense of local and personal connection that transforms the necessary errands of today’s busy lives into engaging experiences,” said Julian B. Wills, president of La Plata, Md.-based Dash In, a Wills Group company.

Having been in the Richmond, Va., market for some time, Dash In is fairly new to the Chesterfield County market, which made it the right fit to introduce the reimagined store model from a real estate perspective, Wills explained. Working with L2M Architects, Dash In developed a design that reflects its vision and ties it to the local community. Situated on 2.4 acres of land, the 5,600-square-foot convenience store opened March 9 and is Dash In’s largest store to date.

“The beauty of this site was knowing we had the real estate to be able to do this and go

to the larger store format. We think we’ve created that convenient, one-stop shopping with this location,” Wills expressed.

Making It New & Fresh

Located in an area that has a healthy mix of residential and commercial activity, the prototype’s interior branding uses sepia tone imagery of Richmond landmarks, allowing Dash In to capitalize on the personal connection customers have to this specific marketplace.

The store also features earthen materials like brick and elevated wood siding, open ceilings and subway tile. Exterior elements of the store are influenced by Jeffersonian architecture.

An expansive kitchen serves as the centerpiece of the Chesterfield County location, allowing customers to clearly locate it upon walking into the store. The move to put foodservice at the epicenter of the store design was intentional.

“From a trust perspective, we wanted customers to be able to see the food being produced because we wanted to have that transparency. It also illustrates the freshness of everything being made on-site, on demand,” Wills explained.

Its Chef’s Craveable foodservice program — which includes all-day breakfast, artisan sandwiches, grab-and-go wraps and salads that are prepared in-house daily — has

been adapted to fit the concept of localized. Specific to the Chesterfield County location, Dash In is testing two new menu items: a Buffalo Chicken Quesadilla and Chicken Parmesan sliders. The latter is the seventh variety in the retailer's slider sandwich program.

Thanks to the size of the kitchen, Dash In anticipates using this location to introduce and test more localized menu items before rolling them out to its other stores.

Turning to its beverage offerings, the retailer has introduced a growler and crowler program in this new format. Although alcoholic beverages aren't something the chain is explicitly looking to get into, the program is a unique characteristic that the retailer wanted to incorporate given the prominence of craft brewers in the Richmond market.

As part of the program, eight taps change frequently and feature beer selections from local and regional craft breweries. Currently, Dash In has tapped 21 Virginia breweries, 20 local breweries and six micro-breweries. Customers can purchase a 32-ounce canned crowler or a 64-ounce glass growler, or refill their own growlers as part of the retailer's refill program. According to Wills, Dash In is the first retailer in the Richmond market to sell crowlers.

"The thing we like about offering the growler and crowler program in this market is that there are 32 craft breweries in the Richmond market, so the area skews very high for being craft-beer connoisseurs. We figured it would be a logical fit, knowing that there's a strong demand in the marketplace and knowing it could be incorporated in future Richmond locations," the Dash In president said, noting that in other regions where it operates, the retailer isn't permitted to sell alcoholic beverages, but it is in Richmond.

Over time, Dash In is planning to elevate its non-alcoholic beverage offerings as well. The lineup in the new-format store currently consists of:

- A basic cold-dispensed menu, with 16 rotating varieties from national partners;
- Flavored-infused waters and fruit-infused teas;
- A full coffee program;
- Mountain beverages, including ices and blended milkshakes; and
- A progressive assortment of emerging brands within the non-alcoholic cooler, such as artisan ginger and root beer, health-driven energy drinks, and Yerba Mate.

When it comes to amenities, the Chesterfield County location is the first to feature Dash In's more modern and expansive seating package. Although seating is available at a few locations, it has never been part of



Photo by Donnell Wallace at DW Celebrity Photography LLC



Photo by John Magar Photography



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Customers can purchase 32-ounce canned crowlers or 64-ounce glass growlers and fill them with various beer selections from local and regional craft breweries.

a prototype, Wills noted. Inside, communal tables made from reclaimed wood are completed with bar-top seating, charging stations and free Wi-Fi. Outside, built-in seating benches are complemented with contemporary umbrellas and planters.

"We wanted to accommodate customers and invite them to spend time in the store and linger when they have the time," noted Wills.

Other standout features of Dash In's new neighborhood concept store are:

- An assortment of local products situated in the front of the store, including Good Earth Peanuts from Skipper, Va., which is about an hour away from Richmond;
- An expanded wine selection;
- 16 fueling positions; and
- Dash In's proprietary Splash In ECO Car Wash, a 53-foot-long rollover car wash that's open 24/7 and features six free vacuum stations with weather canopies. This marks the 38th Dash In location to include the car wash.

Building Brand Equity

When asked about the future of Dash In's new prototype,

Wills told *Convenience Store News* that the retailer will work on redeveloping legacy sites for modernization. Additionally, new stores will feature a selection of elements from the Chesterfield County store, with decisions being made based on each store's size and location.

"The best part of the Dash In brand is that regardless of location, we work to create meaningful, personalized experiences that enrich our customers' lives," he said. "That's one way we feel like we can set ourselves apart and differentiate from the competition of some of the other regional and national brands that don't go to that level of personalization."

The Richmond market will remain a focal point for Dash In, as the retailer is currently active in looking for more real estate. Within two years, Wills anticipates that Dash In will have another three or four locations in the Richmond market.



"This is our approach for all markets because we think to have any sort of scale, you need to have at least a half-dozen stores for that sound awareness and equity," he concluded.

Dash In operates more than 50 stores throughout Maryland, Virginia and Delaware. **CSN**

This Dash In store marks the chain's 38th location with a car wash.