

April 2016

### The Whole Foods Story

In 1978, twenty-five-year-old college dropout John Mackey and twenty-one-year-old Renee Lawson (Hardy), borrowed \$45,000 from family and friends to open the doors of a small natural foods store called SaferWay in Austin, Texas. When the couple got booted out of their apartment for storing food products there, they decided to simply live at the store. Since it was zoned commercial, there was no shower stall. Instead, they bathed in the Hobart dishwasher, which had an attached water hose.

Two years later, John and Renee partnered with Craig Weller and Mark Skiles to merge SaferWay with their Clarksville Natural Grocery, resulting in the opening of the original Whole Foods Market on September 20, 1980. At 10,500 square feet and a staff of 19, this store was quite large in comparison to the standard health food store of the time.

Less than a year later, on Memorial Day in 1981, the worst flood in 70 years devastated the city of Austin. Caught in the flood waters, the store's inventory was wiped out and most of the equipment was damaged. The losses were approximately \$400,000 and Whole Foods Market had no insurance. Just when they thought there was no way they could survive this tragedy, customers and neighbors showed up with shovels to help dig them out. They voluntarily joined the staff to repair and clean up the damage. Creditors, vendors and investors all provided breathing room for the store to get back on its feet and it re-opened only 28 days after the flood.

Whole Foods seeks out the finest natural and organic foods available, maintain the strictest quality standards in the industry, and have an unshakeable commitment to sustainable agriculture. Their customer loyalty is off the charts because their mission resonates with a growing population of citizens whom are concerned about contamination in our nation's food supply.

SELF CHECK: Who would show up with a shovel to help you dig out if your business was devastated by a flood? Would it be a substantial enough showing to allow you to re-open your doors?

**Thriving Michigan** is a statewide movement that shares the message of conscious capitalism. Recognizing that business is the greatest organizer of human effort on the planet – this program is guiding six Michigan Chamber's of Commerce as we create awareness about the four pillars of this "new business normal". [www.thrivingmichigan.com](http://www.thrivingmichigan.com). [www.monroecountychamber.com](http://www.monroecountychamber.com).