CTown keeps focus local

By CHARLES PAULLIN
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NEW BRITAIN — His father, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, ran a grocery store in Queens until the landlord threatened to raise the rent when the store's lease was up.

After searching for a new location in Florida, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Larry Diaz said, the family settled on New Britain 13 years ago for the store's new location and to fill the grocery store void downtown.

"We said, 'You know what, the community needs a store here,' " said Diaz, owner of the CTown market at 47 Main St. Diaz is one of three brothers who own this location and others in Meriden and New Haven.

Since coming to the Hardware City, the grocery store with 10,000 square feet of retail space on the main floor and 12,000 feet of storage space in the basement has been providing products local residents desire.

"Our niche is to cater to the neighborhood that surround the stores," said Diaz.

CTown is unlike a Big Y or a Stop & Shop grocery store that will have multiple locations, but have them all built nearly the same, offering the same products.

Charles Paullin | Staff
Larry Diaz stands in the produce section of CTown in New Britain.

For CTown, the plantains, yucca and kielbasa Puerto Rican and Polish residents want are imported and are always easily available. The store can also order and sell other specialty items, such as soursop, a fruit popular in Jamaica that is believed to have cancer-fighting benefits.

The United States is "a country that (has) a large population of different immigrants from different parts of the world and that's where we come in and say let's bring what the neighborhood wants," he said.

At the same time, the store has traditional American foods including mayonnaise, canned vegetables and regular household items such as detergent and dish soap. The store also has its own butcher.

With about 30 full-time and part-time employees, Diaz said his store is always keeping technology up to date and is maintained and cleaned regularly.

Last winter, the store used a program from Eversource to use more efficient lighting and fans to cut down on overhead costs and make the store eco-friendly.

"To stay competitive you always have to look at better ways to run the business," said Diaz.

Diaz is also active in the community, including catering a New Britain High School event last year, providing sandwiches for the Ana Grace Project when Chelsea Clinton visited CCSU this past weekend and preparing food for local church events.

"It's a responsibility for us to help," said Diaz. "We're part of the community."

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