The Most Popular Giraffe in Michigan

When crews began dismantling a Meijer gas station outside of Lansing recently, Store Director Jeremiah Hernandez was reminded why his store is an undisputed source of pride for the Delta Township customers who call it, 'My Meijer.'

His West Saginaw Meijer Express features a 14-foot giraffe.

The community was buzzing within hours of a large crane removing the 14-foot-tall statue from its traffic-peering perch on top of the store's gas station overlooking West Saginaw Highway earlier this week. Nearly every customer walking into the store asked, "Why are you getting rid of our giraffe?"

"We're flattered that customers are so concerned, but we understand how much the community values it as a local landmark," Jeremiah said. "Taking care of the West Saginaw giraffe has been a priority since planning upgrades for the new Meijer Express convenience stop. Our store and giraffe have been part of this community for more than 50 years, so we are absolutely bringing it back."

Since mysteriously being installed on the gas station's canopy in the early 1970s, the statue has not only become a roadside curiosity, but a conversation piece full of local folklore and speculation. While many stories circulate, here are some details to help separate fact from fiction:

- The West Saginaw Meijer opened in 1966, making it the fourth Meijer store outside of West Michigan.
- Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Meijer featured a playland for children inside the store called, "The Oasis." Located in the center of Meijer stores, the area was filled with kid-friendly features, such as animal statues, so they could play while parents shopped.
- During a store remodel, a contractor ordered a giraffe that was ultimately too large for kids to play on. Rather than return it, the contractor played a joke on store leadership and installed the giraffe statue on the canopy roof of the gas station.
- In the early 1970s, Meijer stores all featured unique designs, so the West Saginaw giraffe instantly gained popularity for its unique placement.
- The store considered removing it once, decades later, thinking it was a thing of the past. But the response from the community was so immediate that store leadership brought it back by popular demand.

Other stories about the history of the giraffe, peering over West Saginaw Highway, vary.

But one detail that Hernandez can confirm is the only plan his store has over the next few months is to keep the West Saginaw giraffe safe until the old gas station is remodeled into a new Meijer Express convenience stop.

For now, it's securely bolted to the ground as if in a corral, next to its previous perch. It will soon go into storage so it can be refurbished for its return later this fall.

Additional assets available online: Photos (3)