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Empire's family of brands rolls out Sensory Friendly Shopping to more than 450 stores across the country

Grassroots efforts at Sobeys, Safeway, IGA, Thrifty Foods, Foodland and FreshCo stores create a more inclusive environment for shoppers with sensory sensitivities

Stellarton, NS – Empire's family of brands is redefining how Canadians shop by rolling out weekly Sensory Friendly Shopping hours at more than 450 stores Canada-wide. The new, more inclusive shopping hours will be offered in Sobeys, Safeway, IGA, Thrifty Foods, Foodland and FreshCo stores.

A first-of-its-kind at the national level by a Canadian retailer, Sensory Friendly Shopping focuses on removing sensory stimuli that can overwhelm an individual with sensory sensitivities.

Sobeys, Safeway, IGA, Thrifty Foods, Foodland and FreshCo store managers have been stepping up and offering Sensory Friendly Shopping on a store-by-store basis since the fall of 2018. The idea initially began as a grassroots initiative at one Sobeys store in Prince Edward Island and quickly expanded to Nova Scotia, and eventually throughout Atlantic Canada.

Continued positive customer feedback around this initiative has fueled the cross-country momentum to create a national network of stores with inclusive environments for all families to shop. Now, from Salt Spring Island, B.C. to Corner Brook, NL, store teams are taking the lead in implementing Sensory Friendly Shopping hours in their communities, dimming store lights, and turning off music, PA announcements, and cash register sounds.

"The grocery store is a central hub of the community. We pride ourselves on creating an inclusive environment that reflects our diverse customer base and the communities where we work," said Heather DeBlois, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Sobeys. "It's important to us that everyone knows they are welcome in our stores. Sensory Friendly Shopping has truly been a grassroots movement driven by our store teams, demonstrating how important it is for retailers to consider how they accommodate a diverse customer base."

Recent polling by Pollara shows nearly 8 in 10 Canadians (78%), support sensory friendly accommodations, such as reduced lighting, sounds and scents within retail environments. Across Canada, one in 66 children are diagnosed with a sensory disability each year¹.

Interestingly, the Pollara research also revealed that Canadians know little about Sensory Sensitivity in retail. When asked for level of familiarity with sensory sensitivity in retail, very few (16%) were even somewhat familiar with it. As Sobeys, Safeway, IGA, Thrifty Foods, Foodland and FreshCo roll out this initiative, store teams are taking the opportunity to raise awareness.

"After connecting with the team at Autism PEI, we took a look at what was being done in the retail shopping industry and saw that there was a huge gap in terms of accessibility, especially for people with sensory

¹ Autism Canada 2019

sensitivities, like those with autism or post-concussion syndrome. We decided to change that," said Tammy MacPhee, Sobeys District Operator, Prince Edward Island. "Now, each week we're able to make grocery shopping a little bit easier for families who need a modified shopping environment."

Sobeys has worked closely with various local Autism networks and other community-based organizations across Canada to understand how existing barriers in grocery stores impact the experience of customers with sensory sensitivities and how these can be reduced or eliminated to create a more positive shopping experience.

"We're extremely proud to be partnering with Sobeys, Safeway, IGA, Thrifty Foods, Foodland and FreshCo as they grow their Sensory Friendly Shopping initiative from coast-to-coast," said Michelle Colero, Executive Director, Autism Canada. "Raising awareness of sensory sensitivities is an important first step to creating a more inclusive environment for all. Empire's Store Managers and Franchisees are forward-thinking leaders, setting the tone for the future of retail in Canada."

Empire's stores will continue to bring more locations on board with inclusive shopping hours. Understanding that consistency is important for customers with sensory sensitivities, stores have scheduled specific days and times of the week for Sensory Friendly Shopping hours. Call your local Sobeys, Safeway, IGA, Thrifty Foods, Foodland and FreshCo store today to learn about Sensory Friendly Shopping hours near you.

ABOUT EMPIRE

Empire Company Limited (TSX: EMP.A) is a Canadian company headquartered in Stellarton, Nova Scotia. Empire's key businesses are food retailing, through wholly-owned subsidiary Sobeys Inc., and related real estate. With approximately \$25.4 billion in annualized sales and \$14.0 billion in assets, Empire and its subsidiaries, franchisees and affiliates employ approximately 123,000 people.

Additional financial information relating to Empire, including the Company's Annual Information Form, can be found on the Company's website at www.empireco.ca or on SEDAR at www.sedar.com.

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