

STORE

FROM A1

Shawano to find what she needs.

"It's just not the same," she said of the Save-A-Lot.

Another shopper, George Nahwahquaw, said members of the Menominee tribe have grown accustomed to the store's convenient location and full-service inventory.

"Coming here is pretty easy," he said. "Everybody got used to the idea of Save-A-Lot being here."

When the store opened in December 2011, officials said it had been a decade since there was a grocery store on the Menominee reservation, which is home to about 4,000 tribal members north of Shawano. Many were resorting to shopping at convenience stores, raising public health concerns.

Surveys of tribal members showed that a full-service grocery was among their highest priorities for improvements on the reservation.

So it was cause for celebration when the tribe announced a deal with Save-A-Lot Food Stores



LEADER PHOTO BY SCOTT WILLIAMS

Employee Moon Penass, right, loads a customer's products into a cart in the checkout lane at the Menominee tribe's Save-A-Lot grocery store.

to open a store along state Highway 47 near the center of Keshena. Through Wolf River Development, the tribe became an independent licensee under the Save-A-Lot corporate name.

Save-A-Lot has about 1,300 stores in 30 states, but the Keshena outlet remains the only store nationally on a Native American reservation.

The tribe issued a statement earlier this month outlining numerous problems with the store, including outdated products, unpaid bills and financial

losses. The statement indicated that the business had reached a point of jeopardy.

"Tough decisions have been made to ensure we continue to have a store in our community," said the statement, attributed to the Wolf River Development board of directors.

Save-A-Lot spokeswoman Chon Tomlin said the St. Louis-based chain has provided operational assistance to the Menominee tribe's store, which Tomlin said is not uncommon when an independent store runs into issues.

"They've kind of waved a flag and said, 'We need help,'" Tomlin said.

The tribe indicated in its statement that an internal audit had been conducted

and that store employees were dismissed for unspecified policy violations.

Warrington has overseen installation of new management and new employees.

Recently hired as general manager of Wolf River Development, Warrington returns to the Menominee reservation after working for two years as a manager at the Forest County Potawatomi tribe. There, he was involved in overseeing a \$3.5 million upgrade of roads and other infrastructure.

According to the Menominee tribe's statement, tribal leaders also have restructured Wolf River Development to include other business entities known as the Menominee Indian Economic Development Authority and the Menominee Fuel Station.

Warrington would not disclose how much the development company loaned to Save-A-Lot, but he expressed confidence that the loan would be repaid as the grocery store continues to rebound.

The tribe's statement also indicated that steps had been taken to improve the store's performance.

"With the community's support," the statement said, "we can ensure that the store will be an asset for the community for years to come."