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## Business

## A yen for a deal

Japanese discount giant ready to open at new Aberdeen Centre

by Philip Raphael

Staff Reporter

good deal requires little translation, no matter what the language or cul-Ltural differences.

That's what backers of a Japanese-based discount store are hoping for when the doors of the first North American Daiso 100 Yen Plaza is slated to open Dec. 12 at the new Aberdeen Centre in Richmond.

A cultural phenomenon that has been fueled during the past decade of economic distress in Japan, Daiso is the leading '100 Yen' store in that country with 2,500 stores. And now, thanks to a joint venture with Thomson & Fenn Trading Ltd., a subsidiary of the Fairchild Group, developers of the new Aberdeen Centre, it is coming to this market with a two-storey, 26,000-square-foot store that will be packed with around 40,000 different items from kitchenware to cosmetics.

David Lui, president of Thomson and Fenn likened Daiso's diverse product mix to resemble "a Wal-Mart of dollar stores," without the traditional clutter of many discount outlets.

In fact, one of the big appeals of Daiso, other than its keen pricing which will see everything in the local store carry a \$2 tag, is the presentation.

Daiso works very hard to create that 'Wow!' factor when it presents its products in the store," Lui said. "And that's not something that all dollar stores can do."
Lui said the brightly lit aisles will be

comfortably spaced, and the shelves stocked with an eye to showcase the store than a discount clearing house.

In Japan, Lui said trips to a Daiso store are considered a form of entertainment for shoppers who cruise the aisles just to see what's there.

"We anticipate that those customers who come in just to even browse will come out with 10 to 15 items," Lui said.

And with 40,000 different items on hand, there is sure to be something for just about everyone, he added.

'We are going to stock pots, pans, all kinds of other kitchenware, cosmetics, and fashions like undergarments and tshirts, all for \$2," Lui said. "We are looking to attack the markets served by stores like Home Depot, Home Outfitters, and even Michaels because we will be stocking

But does the Lower Mainland really need another dollar-type discount store? Lui said there is plenty of room in the marketplace for a retailer to offer inex-



Chung Chow photo

David Lui inside the first North American Daiso 100 Yen Plaza, which is opening soon at Aberdeen Centre. The 'two-dollar' store will be packed with around 40,000 different items from kitchenware to cosmetics.

pensive goods, as long as they make themselves unique. And Daiso manages to accomplish that by dealing in large volumes that make product selection vast, and costs low.

"It means we can have something, say like forks, in 10 or 12 different colours and styles. It's the breadth and depth of products that will be outstanding and make us different," he said.

The margins will be small, so where we will do business will be volume." he added, explaining it is not unusual for Daiso to order a product run of 10 million units from a supplier, which drives down the per unit cost considerably.

At the outset practically the entire product line at Daiso will consist of items from foreign suppliers spanning Asia to

Lui said that as the Richmond store develops its clientele, that product mix will introduce local goods as well.

The store will employ around 100 workers and to date is the single largest tenant in the new mall.

The deal to bring Daiso to Canada is quite a coup for the mall and the Fairchild Group since the Japanese firm has been repeatedly courted by North American interests to no avail, Lui said.

Fairchild's success and familiarity with the Canadian marketplace were determining factors in Daiso granting it not only a majority share in the Aberdeen Centre store, but exclusive rights to the chain in the rest of North America.

So far. Lui said there have been talks with interested parties in Toronto, Montreal and Edmonton, as well as Canadian-based landlords who operate holdings in California. But before they cast their net too far afield, Lui said Daiso is looking at at least another two stores in the Vancouver area.

## More Canadian firsts for Aberdeen

Thomson and Fenn has entered into other joint venture agreements to bring recognized businesses that will be firsts for Canada stores to Aberdeen Centre.

One of those is an upmarket ladies' fashion house

called Moiselle. Another is S.B. Furniture, a Thai-based version of IKEA, but with higher quality standards, said David Lui. It will take up a 10,000-square-foot spot in the mall.

And a specialty food outlet that concentrates on

turning out perfect Udon noodles called Ajijiman will be a fixture. Thomson and Fenn will

be basically acting like a bridge for these companies from Asia to help them get into the North American market," Lui said.