



Discount mecca thrills shoppers

By Lena Sin
Staff Reporter

Clutching four baskets in one hand and another in his right, Pi Chang had stumbled into a classic Daiso problem: Too many choices.

"Maybe this is good for holding chopsticks," Chang said aloud before another tall, weaved basket caught his eye. "Maybe this one I can put candy in."

With every step he took, a dozen more choices appeared before him.

But such is the attraction of Daiso, the Japanese discount mecca, which opened its first North American location a month ago in Richmond.

Located inside the Aberdeen Centre, the 26,000-square-foot store carries over 45,000 products.

And every single item, from ties to cookware, is just two bucks.

Holly Nguyen had already picked up a toy for her dog, dog food, rubber gloves, baskets and a mini-disc holder by the time she ambled her way to the belts section.

"It's surpassed my expectations," the 27-year-old said. "I can't believe it. Especially the tableware, it's amazing. . . You can just pick up any regular stuff for a lot cheaper and there's a lot of import, cute things."

As J-pop singers like Kuraki Mai played softly overhead and staff periodically exclaimed "E La Sha E Ma Se!" to welcome customers, Hiro Moriya observed the store was exactly like the ones back in his home country.

"Everything's cheap, and there's lots of things," Moriya explained of Daiso's appeal.

But Dawn Izumi had run into one problem.

"I like dollar stores and this has got everything — except nothing's translated into English," she said.

Daiso has more than 2,500 stores in Asia and at least one opening a day.

In Richmond, its opening-day sales broke all previous Daiso records and shoppers lined up three-quarters of the way down the mall.

Unlike dollar stores, which operate by purchasing surplus inventory, Daiso products are made specifically for their brand.

Its success is based on "economies of scale" or, in plain speak, purchasing in volume.

Each item is bought in no less than 10 million units.

"They always go to a manufacturer, and ask 'how many units do I need to manufacture to realize a lower cost?'" said Fairchild Group spokesman David Lui.

Richmond's Daiso is a joint-venture with media baron and developer Thomas Fung, CEO of the Fairchild Group, which opened Aberdeen Centre.



Allen Redekop — The Province

Shoppers, above, find deals at Daiso, a Japanese discount chain at Richmond's Aberdeen Centre, where everything, even penguins, costs \$2. Lower right, Pi Chang looks over baskets.



The mini-department store sells everything from ties (and not the kinds with Scooby-Doo printed on them), make-up, funky kitchenware, Doraemon stickers, stationery, CD holders, and even toys (for both pets and children).

Worldwide sales now reach \$6 billion US annually and there are plans to open more stores

across Canada.

As for ambitions in Richmond, Lui said they want to eventually carry as many products as the stores in Japan.

"[We carry] about half of what Daiso Japan carries," said Lui. "So we have a long way to go."

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Mom asks: Will longer days help students?

By Frank Luba
Staff Reporter

A Langley mother objects to a school-board proposal to lengthen school days to save \$650,000.

Hattie Hogeterp, who has a 13-year-old son in Grade 8 and is president of the Langley District Parents Advisory Council, said last night that the issue will be addressed at her group's Wednesday meeting.

"My initial reaction is that this is driven by the budget and it's not necessarily the best thing for the kids," Hogeterp said. "I don't mind change as long as there's change that's going to benefit the children and their education."

Langley School District announced Friday it is considering reducing the number of instruction days by 10 and increasing the length of school days to save money and start addressing a \$3.3-million shortfall in 2004-2005.

Under the plan, secondary students would get an extra 17 minutes a day, Grades 1-7 would get an extra 16 minutes and kindergarten kids would get eight more minutes.

A parent survey on the calendar issue is to be completed by Feb. 16 and the board will make a decision March 2.

"It's a pretty short timeline," complained Hogeterp.

The Vancouver School District is facing a \$9-million shortfall for the next school year, after cutting \$100 million and 1,100 staff since 1991. Enrolment has increased by about 4,000.

In North Vancouver, parents from Monteray Elementary will meet tonight at 7 at the school to try save their school from closing.

The district has identified Monteray, Maplewood, Westover and Ridgeway Annex for possible closure in June, with Lonsdale and Westview elementaries being considered for closure or consolidation in 2005.

Funding, decreasing enrolment and surplus facilities are blamed.

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