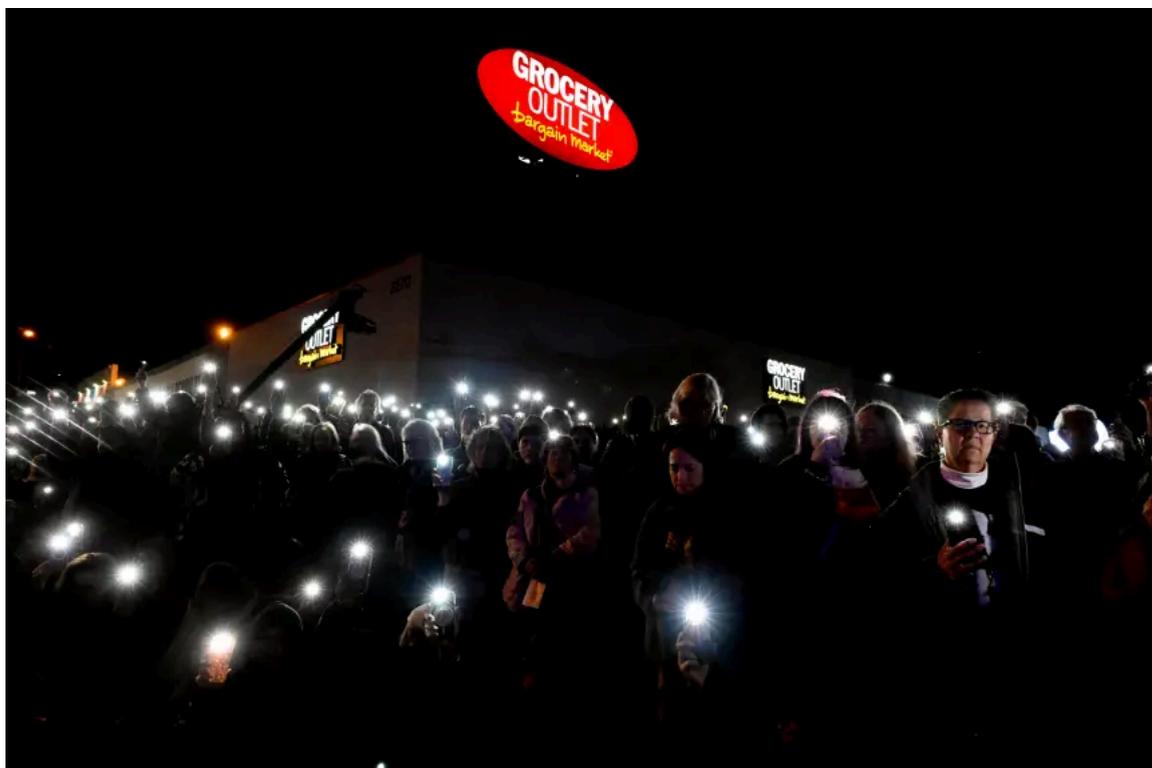


NEWS • News

## Altadena's Grocery Outlet – a vital hub in the Eaton fire recovery – is open for business, amid store closures

Residents expressed relief that the community center, essential amid the Eaton fire recovery, is not on a list of nine California stores to close.



Locals hold up their phone lights during a poem reading by She She Yancy during the First anniversary commemoration of the Eaton fire in front of the Grocery Outlet in Altadena on Wednesday, January 7, 2026. (Photo by Keith Birmingham, Pasadena Star-News/ SCNG)

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Lynn Lawrence, stands during the First anniversary commemoration of the Eaton fire in front of the Grocery Outlet in Altadena on Wednesday, January 7, 2026. (Photo by Keith Birmingham, Pasadena Star-News/ SCNG)

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Altadenans breathed a measurable sigh of relief Monday when news that their [Grocery Outlet](#) is and will remain open for business, amid news of the closure of 9 California stores by year's end.

“We’re here, we’re open for business,” said Sandra Valenzuela, who co-owns the neighborhood hub with her husband Jose.

The couple has been fielding concerned phone calls, emails and visits from customers since the March 4 announcement of the store closures, part of a nationwide restructuring plan to boost profit for the Emeryville-based chain.

The Altadena store, a community hub even before the [Eaton fire](#), has emerged as a communal gathering place since Jan. 7, 2025, and the prospect of losing it prompted many messages from customers with one theme: “Don’t leave us,” the Valenzuelas said.



Mark Mariscal, president of the Altadena Rotary Club and Altadena Library Foundation said the store, which opened in 2019, solidified its status as a community resource for residents and nonprofits through COVID and beyond.

“Hopefully the Grocery Outlet’s corporate leadership truly understands what this store represents.” Mariscal said. “The now displaced locals drive 10, 20 and 30 miles once a week to return and support local businesses. The Altadenans still living in our community also understand the importance the store has.”

The Valenzuelas hire locally and allows local groups to pre-order and purchase items in bulk, he added. The store also regularly supports efforts of local nonprofits and donates to the Friends In Deed food distribution center. And as stalwart members of the Altadena Rotary Club, the Valenzuelas sponsor the Summer Concerts in the Park, moved from the burned-out Farnsworth Park to Loma Alta Park.

Post-fire, groups from regular partners such as the Altadena Rotary Club and international disaster nonprofit ShelterBox to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have set up shop outside the store to distribute supplies or offer aid to wildfire survivors.

Merilee Fellows chose the store as the first stop in the “Music on the Corner” free concert series that traveled around town after the fire. Altadena Library staff regularly make stops too. And in several poignant hours on Jan. 7, 2026, thousands crowded the blocks around the store on the first year anniversary of the fire, remembering the 19 victims that died in the blaze, and finding comfort in simply being together.



Jose and Sandra Valenzuela, owners of Grocery Outlet during the First anniversary commemoration of the Eaton fire in front of the Grocery Outlet in Altadena on Wednesday, January 7, 2026. (Photo by Keith Birmingham, Pasadena Star-News/ SCNG)

The Valenzuelas said the spirit of that evening is something people still marvel to them about, and is the impetus for future events, and not necessarily at their store, Sandra Valenzuela said, mindful that other local businesses should get the spotlight on them too.

“People have been very kind,” Jose Valenzuela said. “They tell us about the support they felt from this place after the fire. It’s nice for us to simply be able to help.”

There have been many heartfelt moments, Sandra Valenzuela added.

Displaced Altadenans trek from wherever they are on the weekends to check on their lots and drop by the store for a visit, loading up on non-perishables to take to their temporary homes. It is one familiar place, they tell the couple.

“Even in hard time like this, what we’ve seen after the fire is, when it gets tough in Altadena, we get together and we push through. We’re honored to be part of that,” Jose Valenzuela said.

The day after the announcement, volunteers from the San Gabriel Valley Habitat for Humanity built frameworks for homes they are rebuilding in Altadena outside Grocery Outlet. In the backdrop of such activity, the sun shines on the now famous “Greetings from Altadena” mural by artist Victor “Ving” Fung and the seminal “Altadena Strong-We Will Rebuild!” banner that community activist Rene Amy ordered and hung days after the inferno began.

The Valenzuelas welcomed high school students from Chicago who came to spend their spring break helping Habitat for Humanity.

“One takeaway from this week’s news is, don’t forget the Altadena community,” Sandra Valenzuela said.

One local casualty in the nationwide closures is the Azusa Grocery Outlet, according to Grocery Outlet Holding Corp. Stores in La Habra and Ontario will also close.

But the location in San Gabriel will remain open, according to owner Belen Doram, as will the store in Duarte, which is closest to Azusa.

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