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When Schnucks Markets wished to buy **National Supermarkets** last year, the Federal Trade Commission said yes, but ordered Schnucks to sell 23 stores - six Schnucks stores and 17 National stores - to prevent Schnucks from dominating the local grocery business. The question was who would buy the stores. More important, would it be one firm, which would be powerful enough to compete successfully? Thankfully, it appears there is such a firm.

A group of former National executives was interested, but only recently has the group found a partner, James R. Gibson of Belleville, who could supply the necessary money. Virtually all other offers were for only a handful of stores, and few of them promised to work with the unions. But the Family Co., as the new operation will be named, promises to hire almost all former National workers and sign a union contract.

The Family Co. will be going up against Schnucks' 90 stores, Shop 'n Save's 23 and Dierbergs Markets' soon-to-be 15. The new corporation will have four stores in St. Louis city, 11 in the county and a handful in St. Charles and Jefferson counties and Illinois. It will use the National name and sell National and Kare private-label products.

The company may just make it. Certainly, consumers - and many supermarket workers who are now working on a temporary basis for Schnucks but will have a shot at permanent jobs with the new chain - have reason to be thankful that it will try.

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