

Last of a breed, milkman takes sweet with the sour

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Four mornings a week Bert Grimm bundles up in his well used dark green quilted jacket and greets the dewy hour of 4:45 a.m.

Grimm, 56, is one of the remaining 200 Twin Pines milkmen who service southeastern lower Michigan homes. Ten years ago the same area was covered by 150 more men.

But time and the rigors of competition from supermarkets and drugstores has divided their numbers. Grimm's territory, which includes Farmington and Farmington Hills, once offered enough door-to-door business to support five other men.

Today, Grimm alone covers a 65 mile route from Nine Mile to Thirteen Mile and from Gill north to Kensington Park.

That territory includes 140 stops for Grimm. Years ago, a successful milkman aimed for one stop every five houses. Now, he aims for one house in 100.

The company which supplies Grimm with his milk and the variety of household products from laundry soap to rock salt predict that the milkman will rise again. The Detroit Pure Milk Co. spokesmen say they hope they will find milkman to pick up long neglected routes in the inner city of Detroit and in the suburbs.

THEY POINT TO improvements in the milkman's lot. Instead of driving expensive hard-to-repair milk trucks, many are opting for step trucks marked by magnetic signs which can be removed when the vehicle is used for family trips.

The home delivery market declined after drugstores and supermarkets began underselling the milkmen, according to Don Caveny, regional sales manager for Detroit Pure Milk.

But gradually, the milkmen have been able to offer prices which are competitive with other outlets, according to Caveny.

Grimm, who delivers to homes, businesses and the Clarenceville School District, is still aware of the potent competition of other markets. Gas stations, drugstores, late night party stores and supermarkets manage to take a loss on milk prices.

"They sell their milk for less than what I buy it for," Grimm grumbles.

Both Grimm and Caveny admit that the industry desperately needs more younger drivers for the routes.



Bert Grimm makes the trip from his truck to a customers' homes more than 100 times each day. (Staff photo)

"They need some young blood for this," Grimm said.

Most of the drivers he works with are between the ages of 40-50.

INSTEAD OF KEEPING to the traditional stock of milk, cottage cheese and butter, milkmen are offering to customers punch, photo developing services, plastic trash can liners, laundry soap, dishwashing detergent and chemicals to clear the ice from sidewalks.

Although business has slowed down over the years, Grimm enjoys the job.

"You can work as fast as you want to work. But there's a lot of work to it," he said.

"I enjoy being with the public."

After 18 years on the route, Grimm and some of his older customers have established lasting friendships.

"Being on the route as long as I have

I know some of these people as well as I know my family," he said.

Grimm can usually guess what customers will need before he reads their orders. But some requests go beyond the traditional quart of milk.

One elderly man and wife asked Grimm for a ride to the veterinarian's office to take one last look at their pet poodle. The dog died the night before and the owners wanted to see it before the veterinarian disposed of it. Grimm drove them there.

Recently, when the woman became ill, her husband asked Grimm to stop into her sick room and greet her after he left off a quart of milk.

Other customers ask Grimm for help in starting their cars in the winter or in fetching prescriptions.

EVEN THE DOGS on the route are familiar with Grimm. He has been bitten three times on the job. All three times, he says, were his own fault.

Once, he stepped on a dog's foot while climbing down from the delivery truck.

"I guess I surprised him. He really did give it to me," said Grimm.

The job gets tough when the truck breaks down.

The last time the truck broke, Grimm had it repaired and was out on the route that afternoon. It took him until 9 p.m. to finish his deliveries.

"And of course everybody wanted to know what happened," he adds in pleased exasperation.

Before becoming a milkman, Grimm worked in a tool and die factory for three years. Tired of staying in one spot all day, Grimm bought out a small route and began delivering milk.

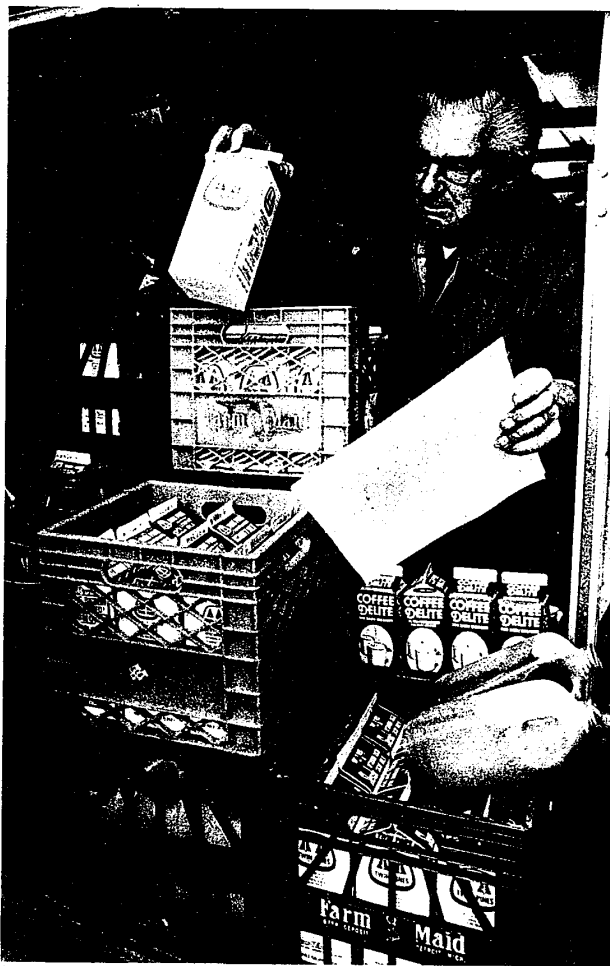
The maze of subdivisions which Grimm visits four times a week confuses persons unfamiliar with it. Two years ago when Grimm suffered a heart attack, two other milkmen covered his route for him. It took them until 4 p.m. to get through the subdivisions.

HIS ILLNESS and the snow storm in 1955 account for occasions on which the milk was not delivered. In 1965, Grimm had chains on his tires and was ready to go but the company couldn't manage to deliver the milk to him.

Last year, during the worst day of the blizzard in January, Grimm missed one day of delivery because the roads were impassable.

Occasionally, the constant getting in

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Men like Bert Grimm carry on the tradition of delivering dairy products and other goods door to door even though their breed are quickly fading from the scene with the advent of discount milk prices at the market. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

INSIDE ANGLES wants to start off the day wishing Nancy Bates a speedy recovery. Ms. Bates, Farmington area senior citizens' champion, recently fell and broke her leg in three places. Angles wishes her happy mending.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY is appealing to all the closet historians in Oakland County. Taking its cue from the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society, the Farmington Historical group is suggesting that persons keep a diary of May 3, 1979. Make it into an autobiography with details of events, brand names of appliances and descriptions of the house, schools and business places, the society advises. The county society has several of the one-day autobiographies which were written 50 years ago. Confine comments to Oakland County activities and send the literary efforts to Mrs. F.C., 33309 Shawansee, Farmington 48024. Sign your name and leave one and one half inches of margin on the left side of the paper. If a typewriter is unavailable use 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and black ink. (IA wonders if Truman Capote started this way.)

HAVE A GOOD SLOGAN for the Founders' Festival. Don't flounder about our founders. Send in a catchy slogan to the Farmington Chamber of Commerce.

IA WAS surprised to see a whole line of young women jogging intensely down Ten Mile near Orchard Lake Road Tuesday afternoon. It must be spring. The joggers have returned to the roads.

WHILE THE FIRST JOGGERS have been sighted, IA bears of some strange winter happenings down at Oak Hill. Seems on Jan. 24, maintenance man Joe Rhodes and Bob Landow donned a horse costume and led an imaginary sleigh ride. All the patients lined up on the second floor and took an imaginary ride through the facility. Cider and doughnuts completed the festivities. (IA was slayed by the thought of it all.)

THE OAKLAND COUNTY SENIOR CITIZEN Discount program will be taking photos for its ID cards on April 27 at the Farmington Nutrition Site at Mercy Center, 28800 Eleven Mile. Photos will be taken from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and from 1:30-3:30 p.m.

THE FARMINGTON COMMUNITY BAND will entertain the seniors at its fourth annual senior citizens' concert at 2:30 p.m., April 1, in the Farmington High School. Charles Owen, percussion instructor at the University of Michigan, will be the guest soloist.

Owen spent 20 years with the United States Marine Band and 18 years with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He will conduct a clinic at 3 p.m., March 27, in the Harrison High School auditorium. That is open to the public also. Seniors who wish transportation for the concert should call Fern Barber at 661-4604 or Marion Daniel at 474-1180. The performance is free but tickets are required. They may be obtained by stopping in or writing to the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department, 31555 West Eleven Mile, Farmington Hills 48018. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Further information can be obtained by calling Mrs. Katie Lipski at 476-6237 or Mrs. Daniel.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY alumni in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties will conduct a dinner dance with the NMU Board of Control at 6 p.m. March 30 at the Finnish Cultural Center, 35200 Eight Mile in Farmington Hills. Guests at the program will include board members E. Harwood Rydholm of Union Lake, vice president of civic affairs for Chrysler Corp.; former Detroit Edison president Edwin George, and NMU president John X. Jamrich. Murray White's All-Stars will provide the after dinner music. Tickets for the dinner may be obtained from Larry Ryssdal, 1109 Yorkshire, Birmingham; call 646-1380. Hassel is president of the Detroit Alumni Club for NMU.

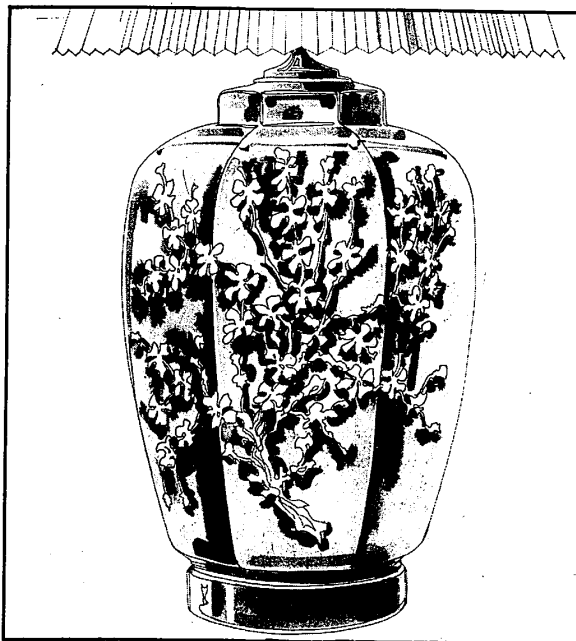
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