

Bon Ton Shoppe is 20 years old

The Bon Ton Shoppe in the downtown Farmington Center is celebrating its 20th anniversary this month.

The gift store and Hallmark greeting card outlet was the first of a chain which includes stores in Brighton, Livonia, Renaissance Center, Clearwater, Fla. The Florida store, opened most recently, is a year old.

The original store was opened to give its owner, Stella Wingerter, "something to do while the kids were in school," she said.

By 1968 her husband Harry left his job as product engineer at Chrysler's Central Engineering Department to help in the operation of the business.

Two of their children now work with the company. Jerry Wingerter is operations manager of all stores, directing both daily operations as well as all seasonal floor layout revisions. Daughter Judy is the general office manager and director of display.

The Wingerter family find it hard to believe that the business is 20 years old but do believe that some of their original customers, who still shop in the Farmington store, will be in for a surprise when they hear of the anniversary.

THE WINGERTERS say they included Jesus Christ in all their plans for the Bon Ton since its beginning.

They lived close enough to the downtown shopping center to watch it being built. They were interested in opening a business but had no previous retail experience, so prayed intensely for guidance.

"When we felt we had His approval, we sought a store in the center," Wingerter said. "Despite lack of experience, the center agreed to lease space and the bank gave us a small mortgage on our home."

"We began making contacts for merchandise and used fixtures. Within 60

days after the Lord's go-ahead we opened a gift and card store completely fixtured and merchandised."

He adds, "Some of those early daily sales figures were so small that we wondered if we had heard the right voice guiding us, but time proved that we had moved in His will."

Looking back, even through the difficult times, Wingerter says all in all, "it has been a pleasurable experience."

ONE OF THE enjoyable experiences of recent times was introducing jars of Sanders hot fudge topping to the customers in the new Florida store.

"Those relocated Michigan people grab those jars up like you wouldn't believe," Wingerter said.

In addition to keeping the store, Mrs. Wingerter has given numerous gift-wrapping seminars to her customers.

Wingerter has served as president of both Farmington Chamber of Commerce and the Gift Division of Michigan Retailers Association. He has also been a member of the board of National Gift and Decorative Accessory Association.

The Wingerter family has no plans for retirement, but neither do they have plans for further expansion, at least for the moment.

The agenda for the time being calls for 20th anniversary year promotions, and incentive programs for the stores' sales staffs and store managers.

The sales staff are having contests between stores throughout the year and the managers of each store are working toward a free week long vacation in Acapulco to celebrate the anniversary.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Crafts for sale

Yarn crafts are the forte of Edith Gurizian (at left) Jenny Van Den Berg, Charlotte Gordon and Helen Kudia. But about 30 kinds of crafts will be up for show and sale when the crafters join artists who have studied in the Gathering Place Wednesday.

Area seniors will take over the center mall in Tally Hall throughout regular mall hours for their show. Then at 11 a.m., 4 and 8 p.m. the Farmington Stoppers, the Gathering Place's dance line, joins them for performances.

Camp Wathana opens summer registration

Camp Fire Detroit Area Council announces the opening of registration for its 1981 resident camping sessions at the Council's Camp Wathana. Programs will begin on June 24 and continue through August 15. Registration before June 7 allows for \$15 discount.

The 370-acre camp, located near Holly, is approximately one hour from Detroit. The camp is open to both boys and girls, ages 7-17, whether or not they are members of Camp Fire. The program is flexible, centered around camper interest and need. Also featured this summer will be special camping sessions for senior citizens and families.

Camp Wathana includes a lodge, dining hall, cabins for sleeping, bathroom and shower facilities. A spring-fed lake provides swimming, fishing and boating for campers.

A newly produced brochure, "Wathana 1981," contains information on all the session times offered, dates, program content for various age levels,

registration information and list of camper's needs and the cost.

The brochure is free through Camp Fire Detroit Area Council, 51 W. Warren Ave., Detroit 48201. Telephone: 833-2670

Besides the general camp experience of horseshoe riding, archery, swimming, hiking, nature crafts and fishing, the camp offers "Grandma & Me," available to 7- and 8-year-olds and their grandmothers.

As youngsters plan their activities for the week they are given the opportunity to share experiences with other youth of similar ages from across the community.

Camp Fire Detroit Area Council is a Torch Drive Agency serving 4,000 youth and adults in Oakland, Macomb, Wayne and Livingston counties. Camp Wathana is owned and operated by the Council and is open to the public 12 months a year for a variety of camping programs.

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