

BUSINESSES

FROM PAGE A1

of west 12 Mile Road and Middlebelt, for instance, now bustles with a steady flow of traffic to Ginopolis on the Grill. But when the restaurant's owners decided to settle at the intersection in 1979, builders still outpaced new buildings.

"They entered to the construction workers that were building the neighborhoods here," recalled John Ginopolis.

He and his brother Peter purchased what was then called Oba's Bar in 1979. "The one (field) kitty-corner from me was completely empty. All the roads were two-lane highways."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Formerly known as The Country Tavern and then Fred's Bar, Oba's was situated in a little house built in 1932 and had attracted blue collar workers from the area, according to John. When Ginopolis was erected behind Oba's in 1982, the old building was demolished, though its memory lives on in an etched mirror by the new restaurant's bar.

Thanks to its well-known Montgomery Inn ribs and ability to attract local and national celebrities, Ginopolis is now a landmark in its own right.



John Ginopolis, owner (left), and Peter Ginopolis run Ginopolis restaurant.

"We've become part of the future of the city. I think part of the city's history," said John, who has been working in the business since he was 12 years old.

John and Peter's father, George, had owned restaurants in Detroit and Redford, but the three hoped to open one of their own. When George died in 1980, the brothers decided to not to wait any longer.

"It was a very difficult time to do any construction," said John, who noted that interest rates were as high as 17 or 18 percent in 1982. "Today there's no way you can even touch it for (what) we did back then."

Ginopolis boasted solid oak wood for flooring, paneling and even the entire bar. Equipped with a dance floor, the eatery was durable by design, enhanced by details such as five 1800s-era chandeliers.

"It was built like Fort Knox, like I always say," said John's son, Peter, who started out as a busboy and is now a general manager.

Although the singles atmosphere was a success, the Ginopolises quickly switched to a family focus. Montgomery Inn ribs established by John's uncle, Ted Gregory, became a staple, and the restaurant gradually gained a stellar reputation.

From Montgomery's spokesman Bob Hope to Liz Taylor and Muhammad Ali, homeowners such as Tim Allen,

Gordie Howe and Edsel Ford, personalities far and wide have all found their way to Ginopolis. In 1990, the championship-winning Detroit Pistons even celebrated in the restaurant's banquet room.

"At first it was intimidating, but now it doesn't faze us at all," said John with a small grin as he showed off the litany of autographed pictures hanging in the lobby area.

"You see the who's who of

Farmington (Hills)," added young Peter, citing the mayor, superintendent and board members as typical regulars. "It's a local hangout for (them)."

In 1996, Ginopolis on the Ice was opened in the Compware Ice Area in Plymouth, and the restaurant also offers outside catering.

ACE IN THE HILLS

A bit further west, nestled in heart of the Farmington Hills Pressed Air Valve Park, about a minute from I-75, is another longtime corporate resident.

Established in 1963 by William Joseph Chorkey, ACE Controls - then known as Automated Control Equipment - moved to Farmington Hills in 1968. Specializing in industrial shock absorbers and deceleration technology, the company was family-owned and operated for years.

"When we moved here in '69 basically all this (to the west, in Novi) was farmland other than this industrial park," said William John Chorkey, the only son of William Joseph's seven children and current president of the company. "This industrial park filled up with large companies. It's just really grown and it's become a real thriving (area)."

He showed off original pictures of the company, which began as a simple 10,000-square-foot white brick building with blue trim. Now the facility has grown to eight times its original size with 210 employees, including dozens in Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan.

As one of the first companies in the park, ACE was built upon the innovations of Chorkey Sr., who had worked in the pneumatic valve industry since early 1950s.

Machines that power everything from automotive factories to theme parks need compressed air to help them move. Chorkey's first major invention, which helped make this process more efficient, was the flow control valve.

"It gets mounted on air cylinders to regulate the air flow into the cylinder," explained Chorkey Jr., noting that this concept was the founding block for ACE. "It

Library's among the city's oldest 'businesses'

BY KIM KOWALE
STAFF WRITER

One of perhaps the oldest "businesses" in Farmington Hills is actually a public place - namely, the community library.

Officially "re-established" in 1981, according to a historical packet updated by Library Director Bev Papai in 1997, the Farmington Community Library moved its headquarters to 32737 W. 12 Mile Road in 1972. Another branch is located in downtown Farmington, adjacent to City Hall on Liberty.

Throughout the past three decades, many changes have steadily reshaped the way residents experience their community library. As branch head, assistant director and then director throughout the 1980s, Papai witnessed the arrival of the first computers.

"PCs (were) unforeseen in the early 1970s," said Papai, who began working at the library in 1973. Originally, patrons interested in research had access to California-based Lockheed Missile and Space Corporation's data manager, "Dialog."

Since searches were charged by the second, patrons paid anywhere from a few dollars to several hundred dollars.

TIME OF CHANGE

"Our community easily accepted the idea," said Papai, noting that from 1985-86, searches brought in \$32,000 of revenue for the library. Now, numerous database collections such as Infotrac and OCLC FirstSearch provide free aid in seconds.

Paper and catalogs have also gone high-tech. Karen Terrabassi, an employee since 1977 who now works at the Farmington Branch (opened in 1975), recalls the transition to the new Geac automated system.

"It was so labor-intensive," said Terrabassi of the old process, which organized items by author, title and subject, often resulting in three to eight cards per book. Entering this data into Geac, located in Plymouth, was also a chore: "We had to pack up all the books out of here and bring them back."

After Geac's installation, though, switching over to the Dynix automated circulation system in 1992 was easier, and now nearly all libraries are efficiently linked.

"Now you can remember any words in the title," said Marilyn Smith, branch head at Farmington who began as a paraprofessional in 1978.

From 75 public access computers to radio frequency identification (RFID) chips that track books to self-check-out "express machines," the library today is truly evolved. Some of the most visible alterations have occurred within the past five years, when the Farmington Branch was renovated and the Hills Branch expanded.

MANY USES

The Hills addition spans 22,000 square feet, and includes video-conferencing meeting rooms, quiet study areas, lighted shelving for reference books, a Book Mark Cafe serving up cappuccino and laptop plug-in capabilities galore.

The original wing's upper level was converted into a browsing room complete with computers that help people learn to speak English and flat screen televisions, while the lower level's children's area has been expanded to include "Smart Start," an interactive learning center.

"Through all of these years, we've had a staff amazingly that's stayed pretty stable," said Papai. "We know their (patrons) likes and dislikes, we watch their children grow up. It's a nice sense of community."

(controls) the amount of air put in and determines how fast the cylinder will go."

ACE produced these items until 1978, when California-based Flairline was purchased. Flairline is now settled in the large manufacturing area of the building.

By 1965, Chorkey Sr. had come up with another breakthrough, this time with shock absorbers, which are used to decelerate machines' impact energy.

To put an end to "trial and error" methods, Chorkey created an adjustable shock absorber, which could be adjusted to fit different machines. His invention was so precise that in an ACE demon-

stration, a wine glass placed on top of machinery equipped with the absorber didn't spill a drop.

GOING GLOBAL

ACE now services the Big Three and numerous companies throughout the city, but a decision made in an uncertain time has made the difference.

"My father set up global sales, and that's been a big part," said Chorkey Jr. of the uncommon decision made in the late '60s. "It was a large gamble. I would call it a very smart, visionary move."

Growth has persisted since the Chorkeys sold ACE to Kaydon Corp. in March 2001.

The company is now ISO 9001 system certified, won the Secretary of Commerce's E Certificate for Exports and even stocks its sales department with two engineers.

The arrival of I-75 and expansion has also brought about not only continued growth in the area, but ease of access for employees in the Park.

"Farmington Hills is a great central location. It's a good solid community with a good solid police force," Chorkey said. "It's a safe, good place to do business."

Today, hundreds of other business owners agree.

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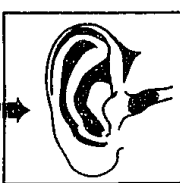
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