



Shoplifting has proven negligible at independent neighborhood markets.

Family-run markets:

Many have stood the test of time

By SUSAN TAUBER KLEIN

Before World War II, when chain supermarkets didn't exist, consumers shopped at "mom and pop" groceries, stores on the neighborhood street corner that offered a friendly greeting in addition to favorite food items.

These stores, whether selling only meat or produce or stocking a full line of food and household supplies, were owned and run by families who usually lived above their stores.

Since the 1940s, chain grocery stores that sell everything from a head of lettuce to a ball of yarn have become commonplace. But the "mom and pop" stores haven't left the marketplace. They've just changed their status to "independent" and continue to offer personal service in addition to specialty items.

According to Edward Deeb, spokesman for Associated Food Dealers, the trade association for food and beverage industries, 40-45 per cent of all grocery operations are independent stores in the tri-county area.

"Our definition of independent food stores go from real small grocery

operations to huge major super stores owned by individuals," Deeb said. "These include specialty stores such as meat or produce markets and delicatessens."

The future for independent stores is "very bright," Deeb added, and this is good not only for the man or woman who wants to own a business but also for the consumer.

HE SAYS THERE are advantages for shopping at an independent store—personal service, time saved shopping and quality.

"If you need to buy a couple of items, you don't have to get all dressed up to shop here," said Verna Wells, owner of J and V Market in Avon Township. "You can run in and get out fast. If you want one good apple, you'll find it here. Since we don't have a large stock, our turnover is fast and everything stays fresh that way."

Jerry Blomquist, owner of B's Market in Auburn Heights, said that since most of his business comes from repeat customers, most people are greeted by their first names.

"Most people shop here for convenience," Blomquist said. "But they also know they can depend on us. We're open all the time, even during the snow. The store has a responsibility to the people out there. This is really their business, not mine."

And if you have a craving for a candy bar sold only in Alabama, chances are an independent food store owner will try to stock it, or any other item, for you.

Like any business, though, there are drawbacks for both the consumer and for the owner.

"I don't like being boss," said Jerry Musellam, who owns Main Food Center in Rochester with his brothers Victor and George. "All the problems become your responsibility. I worry all the time."

MUSSELLAM had reason to worry during the recent blizzard. His food coolers broke and he was responsible for getting them fixed.

Musellam, his brothers and their wives are the only staff in the store. They are the stockpeople, maintenance people and cashiers.

"We have to work because if we hire people, we don't make any money. We can't charge too much because we have to go with our competition."