



Cousins: Livonia residents Steve Plumaj (left) and Alex Kalej pick up a 12-pack before heading to a friend's house.



More munchies: Chris St. John of Farmington waits for his date, Melissa VanBuren of Northville, to pick out munchies for the rest of the evening. They stopped in after a wedding.

Weekend warriors: Customers (from left) Jack Robinson, son John Robinson, friend Aaron Sever stand in line before heading to a hunting safety seminar for kids under 12.

7-Eleven from page 1A

done. After 2 o'clock, you start filling the cooler and getting ready for the next shift."

11:07 — The first bottle return is made, an empty 32-ounce vessel, for Miller Lite. It's the first of many firsts for the shift: 11:08 p.m., first case(s) of beer is sold; 11:10 p.m., the first Slurpee is rung up; 11:11 p.m., the first visibly intoxicated customer rolls in to buy, you guessed it, a case of beer.

11:32 — Three young males barge in, looking ravenous. They prowling the aisles, seek their booty, study its contents and compare weight and packaging. Like Vikings on a pillage, they walk up to the counter carrying two boxes of doughnuts, two large bags of Doritos, one bag of Starburst candy, one large bag of Fritos and a 64-ounce bottle of Mountain Dew. "Do you want to get marshmallows?" one asked the other on this munchie raid.

12:10 — A man wearing shorts and a black U2 Rattle and Hum T-shirt carries a 64-ounce Double Big Gulp of ginger ale, a certifiable kidney cruncher. Behind him stands a guy in his early 20s with a bottle of Snapple. The Snapple guy introduces himself as a former-employee.

Robert Carver, 19, lives nearby and occasionally worked the 11 to 7 shift. "It sucked," he said. The job apparently sucked so much Carver seems stuck there. Carver shows up nightly to josh with whoever's working and to people watch. If he's not at home, his friends come up to the store to find him.

As his Snapple turns tepid and without prompting, Carver gives a rundown of his present job as a mechanic's assistant at Amoco, the progress of his two-man rap/heavy metal band ("The songs are about how the government is screwing us all the time.") and former girlfriends from middle school.

He even fields a phone call at the store. "The job isn't as dangerous as one might believe," Carver said. Occasionally, someone shows up after 2 a.m. to buy alcohol and "gets an attitude" when denied. Otherwise, "I lived here all my life. It's like Mayberry, RFD," Carver said. "It's not threatening. Did you ever see 'Mayberry, RFD' on TV?"

12:57 — "Should have been here last week. Someone hit a skunk," Carver said contorting his face at the aromatic recollection.

tion. "Every time someone opened the door, it was a whole new college."

Three friends of Carver's walk in. They head to the counter to buy lottery tickets. They feel lucky. "It's Friday the 13th, a black cat ran in front of the car. . . . How lucky can you get?" said Phil Bolton, 20, scratching away while Carver shows off his new tattoo to the woman with them.

The lottery duceats are dud. They turn their attention to Carver, who's informed of a gathering at a recording studio in Redford.

Bontion grabs a Slurpee and Carver a 64-ounce bottle of Mountain Dew and head for the door with a guy named Doy and the woman, whose name is Renita Smith.

1:15 — Zwirner is by himself. He's married with three children and lives in Ferndale. He usually works the 3-11 p.m. shift, but the regular midnight guy is on vacation.

Zwirner is not complaining. He was laid off in March from his job as a supervisor at an auto parts warehouse. The 7-Eleven job supports his family. Though Zwirner makes less than half the money he did at his former job, it's better than unemployment he surmises.

"It's tough to make ends meet," said Zwirner, 42. He makes them, though. He works six days a week. He coaches youth baseball so his two sons, 14 and 12, can play for free. Unfortunately, there's no such arrangement for health care. His family is uninsured, he said. "I kept it up for two months, but I had to let it go," Zwirner said. "It was costing \$600 a month."

1:30 — Zwirner awaits the last-minute assault on the beer cooler and liquor shelves. The Farmington Hills 7-Eleven is one of the few to sell bottled spirits. The subject turns to something else behind the counter — a rock holding condoms. Apparently, people have an easier time asking for a pint of Tequila than a pack of Trojans.

"If it's a couple, the woman always stays in the car," Zwirner said. "If there is a line, they'll walk around until everyone is gone. Sometimes I'll just lay them on the counter and let them pick them out."

1:54 — Steve Plumaj and Alex Kalej come into to collect a six-pack of Busch beer. The Livonia

residents are visiting a friend in Farmington Hills and want to take a couple of cool ones with them. They make the last beer buy. As the red digital clock strikes 2:00 a.m., Zwirner dutifully locks up the beer cooler.

2:01 — A man walks in and eyes the beer behind the glass and sees the time on the clock. He huffs. "You're off by one minute. It's actually one minute to . . . the man said. Zwirner shakes his head and smiles. The barrier for beer buying realizes his case is lost and walks out.

2:30 — A couple in their 20s goes straight to the Slurpee machine, cooling as the slushy cola plops into the bottom of their cups. They stalk their icy treats with straws and leave. They will be the last customers for nearly two hours.

3:13 — After mopping the immaculate tiled floor and wiping around the Slurpee and pop machines, Zwirner goes outside.

The dark morning air is still and stagnant. Crickets and scraping noise of a broom head being pushed across the parking lot account for the only sound. A sliver of moon hovers above. "Everything is so peaceful and quiet," said Zwirner, collecting the debris in a dust pan. "It's a nice time of night."

4:30 — A delivery man from Dunkin' Doughnut arrives, bringing in trays of fresh doughnuts, bagels and muffins. The arrival cues Zwirner to brew more pots of coffee. The combined aroma of baked goods and java perforate the groggy senses.

4:50 — A woman in her 40s comes in and buys hair spray. She's followed by a gentleman who inquires if the store carries any flashlights. Zwirner replies no.

"What good are you then," said the man with an edge in his voice that would slice a week-old bagel in half.

Zwirner simply smiles and politely replies the store does have flashlight batteries but not flashlights. The man turns on his heels and walks out the door.

5:05 — Zwirner has the store ready for the onslaught of morning consumers. Since it's Saturday, he doesn't expect the usual rush.

Most will come in for coffee, juice, newspapers and doughnuts to jump start their day. Some people have other items on their

shopping list. Zwirner said the store sells more half-pints of liquor in the morning than in the evening. "They sit out in their cars and wait until 7 o'clock," Zwirner said. "It's really kind of sad."

5:41 — Tom Wheeler of Farmington comes in with his two children, Alyssa, 5, and Dave, 3. "We're heading up north," said Wheeler, who's traveling to East Tawas. "We're getting some go juice."

6:14 — Outside the window, black turns into a lighter shade of gray. Someone makes note of the \$28 million Michigan Lottery jackpot. Dawn and dollar amounts leave Zwirner in a reflective mood.

"I'd never thought in my wildcat dreams at my age I'd be trying to support my family on a job at 7-Eleven," Zwirner said.

He's looking. The realization that jobs are difficult to come by in these hard economic times isn't lost on him. He scours the want-ads daily.

"Sometimes I just want to put a stack of resumes out on the counter," he said.

6:42 — The sun rises to reveal a dank, cloudy day. A jogger streaks by as the 7-Eleven becomes a center of action. Zwirner busily rings up purchases of coffee, milk and newspapers.

6:55 — Farmington Public Safety officer Richard Hennessey comes into the store. Like Zwirner, he's been working all night. "I had to get my diet Mountain Dew," the officer said cradling the green plastic bottle.

Sue Sandellin arrives not far behind. She's the manager and Zwirner's relief. They go over the night's receipts as the register spits out the tape. The bottom line for Zwirner, though, is the shift is over.



It's for you: Former 7-Eleven employee Rob Carver gets a phone call.



Blue Care Network Tour de Michigan

BIRMINGHAM

SUNDAY, AUGUST 29

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Amateurs wishing to compete can register at most bike shops or one-half hour before races begin.

Spectator admission is free. Bring the family and catch the fun!

Grand finale broadcast live from Birmingham, Michigan on WDIV-TV4, Sunday, August 29, 3:00 pm.



Sweeping up: It's 3 a.m. and Don Zwirner, the night man at the Farmington 7-Eleven, sweeps the lot during a lull in business.

