

Groceries, nostalgia on display at Moens

By Tim Schmidt
Journal writer

DEC. 23
'83

In 1933, Raymond Moens opened a small, quaint, rustic neighborhood grocery store on Broadway in Bradley.

Today, 50 years later, and with little cosmetic change to it, he still runs a small, quaint, rustic neighborhood grocery store on Broadway in Bradley, and says he's loved every minute of it.

The spry 76-year-old has never been interested in spreading linoleum over the original solid maple wood floor, or putting in a dropped ceiling to cover the tile there.

He's never been interested in replacing the old (now antique) scale with the more modern digital type or the long-keyed National Cash Register that has the red NO SALE flag pop up in the window for the latest talking models that tell you the price.

That's not to say he's totally against change.

He has considered putting up a new front and taking down the hand-made, white paper signs. But, he's never done it. Did consider it though. Still considering it, as a matter of fact.

Like everything else over the last 50 years, the grocery business has had its ups and downs, Moens says.

Today's business could be better, but Moens said he's gone through tougher times and come out smelling like a rose.



Journal photo by Dwight Nale

Many things around Ray Moens have changed, but his store in Bradley reflects its 50 years of stability.

He began his long business career during the early years of the Depression.

With \$85 and an opportunity, Moens was given a chance.

Since he was 14, Moens sold Watkins Products — liniments, oils, cooking and cleaning products — door to door from his coaster wagon. (He still sells the products, but uses a car today.)

In September 1933, as a young man, Moens was given the opportunity by Numa Ray, a man who ran Ideal Dairy locally, to open a building Ray owned and sell his Watkins products and Ray's surplus milk.

"Ray needed an outlet for his milk and I needed an outlet for my Watkins products. With that, we got together," Moens said.

The men made the deal and Moens has been in the same building ever since.

After the first few months of free rent, Moens turned over the money he made from milk sales to Ray and the money he made from selling his wares went right back into the business.

Moens built a cozy apartment in the back of the store where he and his wife raised their only daughter.

His wife died in 1970, but his daughter and her husband now help run the store.

Moens also rented out the home they had lived in and the rent money also went into the business.

With the income, Moens slowly but surely expanded his store's

bread, flour and other necessities to his current stock.

Born just after the turn of the century, he's survived the rise of the supermarket that ended the reign of the small neighborhood markets. And, he hasn't given into the popularity of the convenience stores that have sprung up in the late '60s and '70s.

Moens explains that his survival against the odds is due to the quality of his merchandise, lower markup and customer loyalty.

Some of the people that come into the store for bread and milk came into the store as children buying candy, he said.

He keeps up with the grocery trade and reads the business magazines, noting some of the

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Moens

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convenience stores have mark-ups as high as 35 percent.

He says that in the large stores you pay for the expensive electric bills, overhead music and large payrolls.

The only people on his payroll is himself, his daughter and her husband, he said.

Another benefit of shopping at Ray Moens, he says, is the personal service.

Each customer is greeted with a warm hello. He knows most of his customers by name and they come in frequently for a pack of cigarettes here, a loaf of bread there.

His business runs on \$1 to \$5 sales, but they add up to make life comfortable for the family.

The old-time friendly grocer attributes his success to a good, clean life.

"If you do what God wants you to do and not go against his word, you'll have a better life," he says.