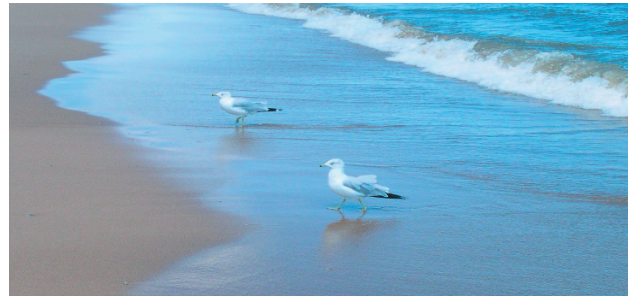


Shoreline Stops

A Visitor's Guide to Shopping on the Lakeshore.



A Trip Down Memory Lane

By Sara Chappell

What ever happened to service with a smile? By this I am not referring to the bouncing black and yellow Wal-Mart logo, but rather the sincere smile and personalized service shoppers used to receive at small independent stores before our society was virtually taken over by massive retail chains. The Mom and Pop shops and old-fashioned storefronts have become a dying breed since our society embraced the concepts of "Bigger is better" and "Out with the old. In with the new." But what if bigger isn't always better? And what happens to "old" aspects that attempt to linger in a modern world?

In Allegan, one business distinguishes itself from the status quo by maintaining the customer service aspects and small town values of days gone by, all while trying to stay competitive and resist societal pressure to conform to the more modern ideas of shopping and retail. Springgrove Variety, located at 125 Locust Street in downtown Allegan, is unique to say the least. The business is an old fashioned dime store, also known as a 5 and 10 cent store, similar to the old Woolworth's chain. At Springgrove Variety customers are not a means to increase a sales clerk's commission; they are family, friends and neighbors. Even out-of-town shoppers and tourists are treated like regulars.

The atmosphere and appearance of Springgrove Variety is far different from the sterile, brightly lit aisles of a Meijer's or Wal-Mart. Its aisles are arranged just as they were seventy years ago, complete with large glass candy cases and expansive storefront windows arranged meticulously according to the season. This store has

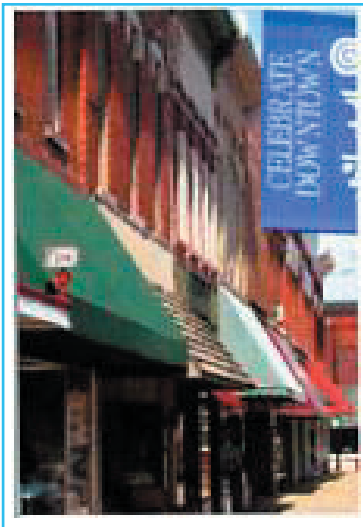
a more personal and customer-driven orientation than the Pamida, Rite-Aid, and Family Dollar stores that have become major sources of competition over the last few decades. At Springgrove Variety, regular customers are known not only by name, but also by their favorite candy or snack. Each day a variety of customers enter, asking for "the usual," knowing that their particular candy of choice will be waiting for them at the checkout once they have finished browsing. Special orders are routine here; no longer "special" or a hassle. Sales clerks are always happy to take the time to look-up an item and add it to the next order. After all, meeting and exceeding customer expectations is a major part of Springgrove Variety's success and longevity.

As customers of this retail relic know, a trip to Springgrove Variety is about more than just shopping; it is a nostalgic experience as well. In addition to being a one-stop shop for basic household needs or that late afternoon candy craving, this dime store is a place where memories are made and remembered. Older generations will recall pre-

vious visits to dime stores like Springgrove Variety. Younger generations will be impressed by the unique qualities that separate this store from the larger retail chains they are more familiar with. Even newcomers recognize the unique qualities of Springgrove Variety upon their first visit, often remarking; "Wow, I haven't seen a store like this since I was a kid," "I remember coming here decades ago," or "We used to have a store like this where I grew up."

No matter what you are looking for, consider stopping by Springgrove Variety on your next shopping trip. Even if you are not looking for anything in particular just wander into the store for a blast from the past. And consider this. Does a trip to Wal-Mart remind you of happy memories from your childhood, like shopping with your grandma when you were little? Will the sales clerk give you the

time of day or the level of service that you deserve? And will you leave the store with a genuine smile on your face or the smirking logo of an impersonal company plastered on each of your bags? The choice is yours, but I would suggest a visit to Springgrove Variety. It would definitely be worth your time. Who knows, maybe you'll like it so much that you will become a regular too!



The Secrets of Success

How can a little dime store in a small town compete against the large retail chains popping up everywhere? It's simple: if you can't beat them, join them. Springgrove Variety dimes contend with more modern competitors like Wal-Mart and Meijer's due to strategy, borrowing the techniques of larger chains and tweaking them as needed. Mike Springer, owner of Springgrove Variety, Inc. owns not only the Allegan store, but five other dime stores throughout Michigan. Springer is able to buy and sell product at much lower prices by dividing wholesale orders according to the specific demands and niche of each individual location.

"We have the benefits of a chain and the individuality of a single store," remarks Lyn Huff, manager of the Allegan store. "We have buying power as a group, yet each store is independently managed and operated." By allowing each store manager to make decisions regarding product selection and placement, Springer's dime stores retain their individualistic nature while utilizing the benefits of a cohesive company. The Allegan store, which specializes in craft supplies and candy, is Springer's sixth and most recent acquisition. It was formerly known as the R. B. Huff Store, a family business, owned and operated since 1933 by current manager Lyn Huff's father and grandfather.