



THE COMMUNITY PAGE

Saving Center—Since 1944

Remember the General Store of old? You'll be reminded of it all over again by walking into Saving Center grocery store and stepping back in time.

Surprisingly, a compact retail store can hold something for everyone: Groceries, of course, and a butcher on duty, but also fresh houseplants and garden seeds, notions and greeting cards, hot lunch items and hardware, office supplies and (best of all) Farr's Ice Cream and candy bars. You name it; Saving Center likely sells it.

This concept is not lost on large supermarket planners, but at Saving Center you don't have to cross the north forty to find what you want. Just a few steps from the parking lot puts you in the heart of the store, and the use of the word "heart" is deliberate.

It requires a particular kind of person to balance viable business demands with kind and caring customer relations. This quality, as much as the variety of merchandise, lies at the heart of Saving Center's success, and is generated by the goodness of one man, Vern Kelsch.



Vern Kelsch has been welcoming customers to the historic Saving Center for three generations.

“The Best Store in Town!”

When Sherman Howard opened the first Saving Center in 1944, on the site where it still stands at 344 Memorial Drive, he had the wisdom to hire the kind of people who felt the same way he did about the business. He soon hired Vern, who eventually bought into the business and, at almost 82 years of age, can still be found there every day.

Vern is a man who has always thought of others first—family, customers and neighbors. His acts of dedication and kindness are seen in the tender care of his ailing wife and sweetheart, Mildred, in his concern for his sons and daughters, in the selfless acts of years of plowing snow at Christ the King Catholic Church—the identity of their benefactor unknown to anyone—as a consideration to his fellow parishioners.

This kindness was not lost on customers, who recognize value and service when they see it. Because of its popularity, Saving Center expanded, eventually opening three more stores in the city: In Ammon, on Northgate Mile, and on 17th Street where Hastings now operates.

In due course, large supermarkets took a toll on the more personal establishments, and Saving Center was forced to consolidate to the original site. Of all the small stores of that era, only the Memorial Drive Saving Center remains. As long-time customer and local food expert Dolores Casella says, “To my mind, Saving Center is far and away the best store in town.”

Retailing is full of surprises. Like the morning Vern came to work to find a would-be burglar had chained the store's safe to a stolen wrecker truck to drag it out of the store. The fact that the safe was buried in cement was lost on the burglar, to the detriment of the truck. The thief was gone, but the idling truck,



Jim Webster, Savings Center employee for 46 years

the chain and the safe remained.

Part of the reason Saving Center is still popular after all these years is that it caters well to older customers who don't want to walk so far to find things, and who have limits on what they can spend. In both ways, Saving Center remains the store of choice. It is aptly named “Saving” Center.



Ruth Hackman, Saving Center employee for 37 years

Customer loyalty is only part of the reason for Saving Center's continued success. Employee loyalty is another. Jim Webster has worked in the meat department for 46 years. Nick Rigoulot has managed fresh produce for 15 years. And Ruth Hackman's experienced hands have



Mary Ann Beasley, Saving Center employee for 11 years

checked our groceries since 1970. Vern's son, Richard, and his wife, Helen, are mainstays, upon whom he depends deeply. Employees, past and present, use such phrases as: “I've never worked for a more honest and dedicated man,” “He is the kindest gentleman I know,” and “He is a wonderful man.”

They also remember annual Christmas parties with thousands of dollars in gifts, many years of Vern's helping them through insurance programs, and profit sharing. Faithful employees like Mary Ann Beasley and Carlos Cortez have shared what Vern describes as a love of the customers and of finding genuine



Just a few steps from the parking lot puts you in the heart of the store



Carlos Cortez, Saving Center's “new kid on the block”

enjoyment from waiting on people. Jim Webster reminds us. “There are not many jobs where you would stay for all those years. It's great to work with Vern because you feel like you've done your job well.”

Just as Saving Center sits on a truly historic site, where Idaho Falls began so many years ago, the business earns its appellation, ‘the best store in town,’ by simply sticking firmly to priorities: customer satisfaction is paramount, shopping convenience considered above profit, and prices are fair enough for both the owner and the customer—three things you don't experience every day. That is, unless you shop at Saving Center.

