

Atwood grocer talks about the economy today

By Ron Wilson

How does a locally owned, small town grocery store compete in today's economy?

Here's a formula: "I want to have the cleanest, friendliest store with good value and the best possible service," said Michael Braxmeyer, owner of Williams Brothers Supermarket in Atwood. Along with a lot of hard work, that formula has enabled this store to compete.

Braxmeyer's family has been involved in Williams Brothers Supermarket from its founding. His mother was a Williams — a first cousin to the two brothers who co-founded the store in Atwood in 1937.

In 1962, the last of the two co-founders died. Michael's parents then moved from Nebraska to Atwood to manage the store. Michael attended K-State, met his wife, and served in the military before commencing a career with K-Mart which took him to Des Moines, Chicago, and Milwaukee. By 1974, he and his wife had a daughter.

"We didn't want to raise our kids in a large city," Michael said. They moved back to Atwood and joined the family business, Williams Brothers Supermarket. A son and another daughter were born in Atwood as well.

Michael found that his father enjoyed the people and the grocery business, but did not enjoy the increasing paperwork, regulations, and computers.

"My dad walked me back to the office, pointed at the office door and said, 'I don't ever want to go in there,'" Michael said. So Michael picked up the back-office operations, learned from the department heads, and worked his way into store management.

"I swept the floor and stocked the shelves and learned from the people who were doing it," Michael said. Today, Williams Brothers Supermarket has expanded to an 11,000-square-foot store with 28 employees.

Michael recently participated in a food distribution dialogue hosted by K-State's Center for Engagement and Community Development. Dr. David Procter, the director of the center, led the dialogue. One key issue discussed is how locally-owned rural grocery stores can compete in today's economy.

No easy answers were found, but Mr. Braxmeyer believes the key is found in value and service from local stores.

"You're never going to be as big or have as many frills as the

big box stores," Michael said. "We want to be as clean and friendly as we can be and provide a good value for your dollar."

"I heard a guy say one time, 'I've invested in this business, I pay taxes, and you owe me your business because I'm local,'" Michael said. "But I don't agree with that. I believe you owe me your business because I earned it."

Michael goes the extra mile for his customers — and I mean that literally. His store provides home delivery of groceries, as well as a remarkable diversity of services within his store.

There's more than milk and eggs. Inside Williams Brothers Supermarket, one can find a sit-down deli, ATM, stamps, money orders, notary public, UPS service, photocopier, dry cleaning, fax machine, Western Union, and even a laminating service. Such services are remarkable to find in a rural community like Atwood, population 1,258 people. Now, that's rural.

The store is even on the World Wide Web, with recipes, advertising specials, and online coupons at www.williamsbrossupermarket.com. Michael also believes in giving back to his community, whether it is advertising for the football team or donating to local church benefits.

That's part of the reason that K-State's Center for Engagement and Community Development launched its rural grocery initiative.

"Local grocery stores represent a critical piece of the infrastructure sustaining America's rural communities," Dr. Procter said. "These stores are often the main provider of healthful food in town. They offer local jobs and provide significant tax revenue to the community. And stores like Atwood's Williams Brothers Supermarket provide a wonderful place to see neighbors, meet friends, and catch up on local happenings."

So how does a locally-owned, small-town grocery remain competitive? Good environment, good value, and great service. We salute Michael Braxmeyer of Williams Brothers Supermarket for developing this formula. For businesses that commit to that formula, I think good things are in store.

Editor's note: Ron Wilson is the director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.



THE TRAIN HAD PLOWED a little snow before reaching St. Francis.

Herald staff photo by Tim Burr

Snow storm brings needed moisture

A spring snowstorm moved through northwest Kansas late Friday night. It started with rain which quickly turned to large snowflakes. Saturday morning, the snow was still falling but as the morning progressed, the snowfall was heavy and there was freezing, fog and windy conditions reported by the National Weather Service. The wind was coming from the north at a steady 30-plus miles per

hour and gusting to 41 miles per hour.

Roads were considered slick and snow packed with blowing snow so U.S. 36 and I-70 were closed on Saturday. All roads were opened early Sunday morning.

Kathy Woodcox, St. Francis weather observer, reported a cold 29 degrees high on Saturday, Sunday and Monday with temperatures dropping to 3 and 4 degrees

on those mornings.

She reported 8-inches snow accumulations and .69-inch moisture. There was also a trace Sunday evening when, almost out of nowhere, it began to snow again.

The sun was shining on Monday and Tuesday but it was still cold. Tuesday, the high was around 40 degrees. The National Weather Service outlook for the

rest of the week shows a steady warming with Sunday topping out at 61 degrees and the lows above freezing.

The wet snow will help the winter wheat and pastures. While it was beneficial, the moisture deficit is still showing northwest Kansas in the drought area. But, as some farmers were heard to say, "it's a start."

REGIONAL

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ond, Bailey Merklin - honorable mention; Ally Northrup - honorable mention; Feature Writing - Aly Schlepp - honorable mention; Editing - Ally Northrup - honorable mention.

These students will advance to state competition held at the Uni-

versity of Kansas in Lawrence on May 4.

"I am delighted that so many students placed," said Brenda Day, yearbook instructor. "This is the largest group we have ever qualified and it will be exciting to take 20 young journalists to the state competition."

Seed exchange planned Saturday at bowling alley

The St Francis Garden Club will be hosting a "Seed Swap" from 3 to 4 p.m. on Saturday, March 30 at Cheyenne Bowl.

Participants bring seed packets with them, usually either seed they saved from last year or remaining seed that they did not use and are not planning on using again. The packets are placed on the table with everyone else's seed.

Then participants pick through all the packets of seed on the table to find seeds that they want to take and grow in their gardens this year.

Participants get to pick out and keep the same number of packets they brought with them. For example: If a participant brings five seed packets to enter then he can pick out five seed packets from the pile.

There is no cost to participate and no minimum number of packets you need to bring.

This is a great way to interact with other gardeners and get new varieties of seed while sharing seeds you have an overabundance of.

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~ George Young

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