

Atwood grocery store keeps business competitive

By Ron Wilson
director, Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development Kansas State University

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.

Michael 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 passed away. 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 Michael 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," 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.

Audio and text files of Kansas Profiles are available at www.kansasprofile.com. For information about the Huck Boyd Institute, interested persons can visit www.huckboydinstitute.org.

Current economy makes spending decisions difficult

In today's economy, with a tight job market and rising prices, saving can be difficult, said Elizabeth Kiss, K-State Research and Extension family resource specialist, who is based on the Kansas State University campus in Manhattan.

Almost all of us can have difficulty separating needs from wants, spending unnecessarily or making quick decisions and later regretting an impulse buy, said Kiss, who said saving is the foundation needed to be in a position to cover needs, meet short- and long-term financial goals and build financial security.

A free financial management site, www.KansasSaves.com, is maintained by K-State Research and Extension in cooperation with America Saves, a national savings campaign sponsored

by the Consumer Federation of America.

Prospective savers are encouraged to go to the Kansas site to 1) register for the savings program, 2) sign a pledge to save and 3) set a personal savings goal.

After registering, savers will receive electronic messages aimed at helping them achieve their financial goals, Kiss said.

Participants also will have access to free financial information on a variety of topics, such as consumer credit, teaching children about money, financial planning, managing money in tough times, retirement planning and covering the cost of health care.

Another plus for the site, according to Kiss, is access to eXtension, which offers an "Ask the Expert" feature linked to

financial management specialists from land-grant universities across the nation. The specialists can answer questions about financial management.

The ability to access free financial information and expert help from the privacy of one's home or cubby in the library can be especially helpful for those whose schedules make it difficult to attend financial management classes.

Information on Kansas Saves and is available at local K-State Research and Extension offices throughout the state and online: www.ksre.ksu.edu/financialmanagement.

To follow Kiss on Twitter, go to KansasSaves.

Property Transfers

Real Estate recorded Jan. 18 to Jan. 28

The following real estate transactions have been reported by the Thomas County register of deeds:

- Jan. 18, Audrey Jean and Ernest Schaffer to A7 Family Farm LLC; SE/4 of Sec. 7, T9, R31; W/2 of Sec. 9, T9, R31.
- Jan. 18, Jolene Ann (formerly known as Jolene Ann Harton) and William Olsen to A7 Family Farm LLC; SE/4 of Sec. 7, T9, R31; W/2 of Sec. 9, T9, R31.
- Jan. 18, Sue Weems to A7 Family Farm LLC; SE/4 of Sec. 7, T9, R31; W/2 of Sec. 9, T9, R31.
- Jan. 18, Veronica Lynn (formerly known as Veronica Lynn Albers) and James Messer to A7 Family Farm LLC; SE/4 of Sec. 7, T9, R31; W/2 of Sec. 9, T9, R31.
- Jan. 18, Randy Joseph and Barbara L. Albers to A7 Family Farm LLC; SE/4 of Sec. 7, T9, R31; W/2 of Sec. 9, T9, R31.
- Jan. 18, Kay Shaw share of Arnold and Rosie Albers Trust to A7 Family Farm LLC; SE/4 of Sec. 7, T9, R31; W/2 of Sec. 9, T9, R31.
- Jan. 18, Robert J. Gordon Trust to Deborah R. Shuler; west 3/5 of south 15' of Lot 10, Block 7, Original Colby.
- Jan. 18, Gordon Trust to Deborah R. Shuler; west 3/5 of Lots A, 1, 11, 14-15 and 18-19, Block 7, Original Colby.

Jan. 22, Norma L. Higerd Trust to Ronald R. Higerd Trust; SE/4 less tract of Sec. 36, T6, R33; S/2 of SE/4 of Sec. 25, T8, R32; two acres in SW/4 of NW/4 of Sec. 36, T6, R33; SE/4 of Sec. 33, T7, R31; NW/4 of Sec. 31, T6, R32; tract of SE/4 of Sec. 36, T6, R33.

Jan. 22, Ronald R. Higerd Trust to MLKRR LLC; SE/4 less tract of Sec. 36, T6, R33; S/2 of SE/4 of Sec. 25, T8, R32; two acres in SW/4 of NW/4 of Sec. 36, T6, R33; SE/4 of Sec. 33, T7, R31; NW/4 of Sec. 31, T6, R32; tract of SE/4 of Sec. 36, T6, R33.

Jan. 22, Ronald R. Higerd Trust to MLKRR LLC; SE/4 less tract of Sec. 20, T7, R32; NE/4 of Sec. 28, T6, R32; N/2 of NW/4 of Sec. 25, T7, R32; NE/4 of Sec. 31, T7, R31; NW/4 of Sec. 14, T7, R32.

Jan. 23, quit claim deed, John and Betty Schroeder to Betty L. Schroeder Trust; E/2 of Sec. 24, T8, R36; NE/4 of Sec. 30, T8, R35; S/2 of SE/4 of Sec. 31, T8, R35; SW/4 of Sec. 18, T8, R35; N/2 of Sec. 20, T8, R35.

Jan. 23, quit claim deed, John and Betty Schroeder to John H. Schroeder Trust; E/2 of Sec. 24, T8, R36; NE/4 of Sec. 30, T8, R35; S/2 of SE/4 of Sec. 31, T8, R35; SW/4 of Sec. 18, T8, R35; N/2 of Sec. 20, T8, R35.

Jan. 23, quit claim deed, Lynn and Jean Johnson to Jean Johnson; Lot 6, Block 2, Colby Pine Hill Addition.

Jan. 28, 1180 W. Fifth LLC to Norman L. and Betty J. Behring; west 25' of Lot 5 and east 37.5' of Lot 6, Block 1, Colby Westwood Subdivision.

Jan. 23, Willis Marvin Jr. and Lucina Pape to Carroll W. Cheney; Lot 1, Block 3, Colby Pioneer Subdivision.

Jan. 24, Emily Maxine Jones to Jones Heritage Farms LLC; S/2 of Sec. 4, T7, R33.

Jan. 25, Mikel Jay McClain Pension Plan to Trenton J. Lambert; SW/4 of Sec. 22, T6, R31.

Jan. 25, Darrel H. and Bertha M. Fikan to Alicia Mary Siruta, Bradley John Fikan and Jason Darrel Fikan; NE/4 of Sec. 10, T6, R34.

Jan. 25, quit claim deed, Lynn and Jean Johnson to Jean Johnson; Lot 6, Block 2, Colby Pine Hill Addition.

Jan. 28, 1180 W. Fifth LLC to Norman L. and Betty J. Behring; west 25' of Lot 5 and east 37.5' of Lot 6, Block 1, Colby Westwood Subdivision.

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Fertilizer affects soil pH level

One thing that's critically important to monitor in no-till farming systems is soil pH, according to Kansas State University agronomist Dave Mengel.

"The top few inches of soil may become extremely acidic due to the surface application of nitrogen fertilizer," said Mengel, who is a soil fertility specialist with K-State Research and Extension.

When the soil pH gets too low for optimal crop production, lime must be applied to reduce the effect of toxic aluminum on plant roots, to maintain good conditions for microbial activity and to get the best performance from some of the soil-applied herbicides, he said.

Most growers prefer to surface-apply the lime if the ground is to remain in long-term no-till, but questions commonly asked are, how effective will surface-applied lime be, and how long will it take to start increasing the soil pH?

"A general guideline for lime applications in no-till is: half the rate, twice as often," Mengel said, but it depends on several factors.

He explained that the relative ability of soils to store a particular

group of nutrients, the cations, is referred to as cation exchange capacity or CEC.

Soils are composed of a mixture of sand, silt, clay and organic matter. Both the clay and organic matter particles have a net negative charge. Thus, these negatively-charged soil particles will attract and hold positively-charged particles, much like the opposite poles of a magnet attract each other. By the same token, they will repel other negatively-charged particles, as like poles of a magnet repel each other.

"A coarse-textured soil with a low cation exchange capacity does not require a lot of lime to correct soil pH, but may need to be limed frequently. A finer-textured soil with a high CEC requires a large amount of lime to initially correct pH, but it may be several years before another lime application is needed due to its high buffering capacity," he said.

The frequency of lime applications needed also depends in part on the amount of nitrogen fertilizer and the yield level of crops being produced. In general, the higher the nitrogen rates and yield

levels, the more frequently lime will be needed. Due to the variation in buffering capacity of soils, lime applications should always be guided by soil tests, he added.

"The bottom line is that there are beneficial effects of surface application of limestone to acidic no-till soils even though the immediate effect may only be in the top one to two inches," Mengel said.



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