

Conversation with the Mayor February 19, 2007

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Thinkin About Merchants

My employment background is really quite narrow - clerking in the linens department of W.T. Grant, waitressing for Howard Johnson's, teaching, running a school library, and now village government. That means virtually all I know about retail has come from reading, observation and working with our local retailers and others. Over the last five years they have taught me a lot. Running a store isn't a job; it is a life. That was confirmed for me in another setting when my husband and I stopped in Lake Placid last summer to see the man I had worked for at Howard Johnson's fifty years ago. He had opened the restaurant two years earlier and is still running a very successful business in exactly the same spot.

What else have I learned? Successful retailers are self motivated. They give up a lot to have their own place - vacations, the extras that are not as important as growing the business, time for themselves. The business has to come first. My brother-in-law who owned a distributing dairy rarely, if ever, was able to take a vacation with his wife and kids. Somebody had to deliver the milk.

Successful merchants also work together, cooperating, collaborating, doing together what none could do alone. Together they create a critical mass which brings outside money into the community to their individual benefit and that of everyone else, merchant and resident alike.

Everyone expects something from our merchants - the item we want when we want it at the price we want - and the color and size, too, of course. They give us service, the convenience of parking out front or back, the compliment of knowing our preferences and alerting us when something of interest comes up. Our merchants support local fundraisers for school, church and community projects. Merchants in a community like Palmyra are also our neighbors. They live next door, down the street, around the corner. Frequently they belong to the same church or club. Their kids or grandkids play on the same teams or are in the same Scout troop. We know them on multiple levels which, I think, is one of the benefits of living here. Their involvement with each other and the community benefits everyone.

Without them, the community would wither and die. What can we do for them? It's simple - patronize them.