

WAL-MART (cont)

By Bill Hunt
The Intelligencer

It's been two years since Wal-Mart opened its doors to Quinte residents and business is brisk for the retail giant.

"We had a very good year in '96, and '97 is starting off very strong for us," said manager Curtis Olsen.

The huge building is really several stores in one, with an optical store, McDonald's Restaurant, photo-developing lab, pharmacy and hair styling centre.

"We tend to try and make it a one-stop shopping store," says Olsen. "We try to create as many services, or destination points, for the customer as possible."

"Some of the other Wal-Marts have a Tour-Mart (travel agency)," he added.

In December, 1996, the store installed a 7.5-metre cooler and added dairy products to its inventory.

"We're carrying Reid's Dairy products now, which we weren't doing this time last year," said Olsen. "It's kind of a convenience for the customers. They might not have to go to the grocery store that day. ... It's been good for us because Reid's is a local supplier and the customers recognize it, and it's been really successful for both of us."

Wal-Mart now has milk, ice cream, bread and juices, and will carry seasonal items such as egg nog.

This variety of products and services attract customers. Items such as eyewear aren't impulse purchases, notes Olsen, but once a Wal-Mart customer knows the store

has these services, they may return specifically for them, he says.

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Customer service and employee knowledge are other ways of achieving customer loyalty.

"We have computer-

based learning for our associates. For example, someone working in paint products, they would have that sort of training to help the customer make the best selection."

The training is initially done when the associate is hired, but continues throughout their employment.

"Pricing is obviously really important for the customer, but they also like to have a knowledgeable person on the floor to help them out."

Taking that principle a step further, Olsen plans to

have representatives from fishing supply companies come to the store and discuss the various merchandise.

"Obviously in this area, fishing is really big. We'll end up doing a big promotion when fishing (season) gets going."

As an added incentive, associates are included in a profit-sharing program.

To keep on top of everyday activities, a meeting is held each morning with employees before the store opens. Tips are offered on anything from safety to ways of stocking shelves,

and the previous day's sales are discussed with the staff, along with "any other information we think the associates should know."

The same process is completed for the evening and night shifts.

Almost all the company's products come from a central distribution facility in Toronto and are monitored by computer. When the store's inventory

Just the facts

- Wal-Mart opened March, 1995 in Thurlow Township, just north of Highway 401
- covers 11,250 square metres
- includes a hair styling salon, McDonald's Restaurant, eye-care centre, pharmacy and photo developing lab
- installed a 7.5-metre cooler in December, 1996 to enable it to carry milk, ice cream and juice drinks
- has a profit-sharing plan for employees
- uses on-going training to ensure workers are knowledgeable about the products in their departments.

becomes low in one item, it is automatically ordered by the computer.

Olsen doesn't see any major changes on the horizon, but notes another store could be built on the lot leased by Wal-Mart. The Office Place is south of the store on the same lot.

"One thing we'll be looking at with interest is how the amalgamation goes. Right now there is no bus service in Thurlow," said Olsen, speculating on how amalgamation could affect the store.

Bill Hunt