

Warkworth no longer has a grocery store



What's ahead for a small rural community when the only grocery store closes?

Journalist Suzanne Atkinson visits the hamlet of Warkworth, snack dab in the centre of Northumberland County, to find out.

By Suzanne Atkinson

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If you want to grocery shop in Warkworth, you'll need a short list.

This small hamlet, set smack dab in the centre of Northumberland County, has three restaurants, a bank, post office and a pharmacy. It boasts a doctor, massage therapist, two dentists and a visiting dentist. Within 10 kilometres there are three golf courses as well as a medium security federal penitentiary. This little berg of about 800 also sports a couple of art studios, an upscale consignment store, organic café and coffee shop, a funeral home, nursing home, furniture store, four churches, public school, hair salon and a bustling Co-op. Annually it hosts a perfect pie contest, maple syrup festival and rodeo.

But Warkworth no longer has a grocery store.

The Warkworth Foodland closed last month after decades in a rickety old on Main Street. Under a leaky roof and along tiny crammed aisle, locals and visitors would greet each other as they picked up their cereal, bread and cheese. Junk food, frozen food, fresh vegetables: it was all there for those who chose to do their shopping in this historic Trent Hills community.

Derek Dickson, who with wife Marg owned the store for the past 16 years, has closed up shop and since refused to comment publicly on the decision to stop fighting with larger stores in nearby Campbellford for customers.

The closure comes as a host of arts, cafes and cultural interests are flocking to the community - attracted by what the locals aren't quite sure.

New Trent Hills Councillor Dean Peters calls the closure "unfortunate".

"There are some people in Warkworth who will be hurt," the municipal rep says. "I personally bought groceries from Warkworth Food Town, but I didn't buy as many as I should have. That's true of other

stomachs from which to draw their clientele.

In Warkworth, local business operators say they expect to feel the impact of the grocery store's closure as their patrons are forced to travel elsewhere for food.

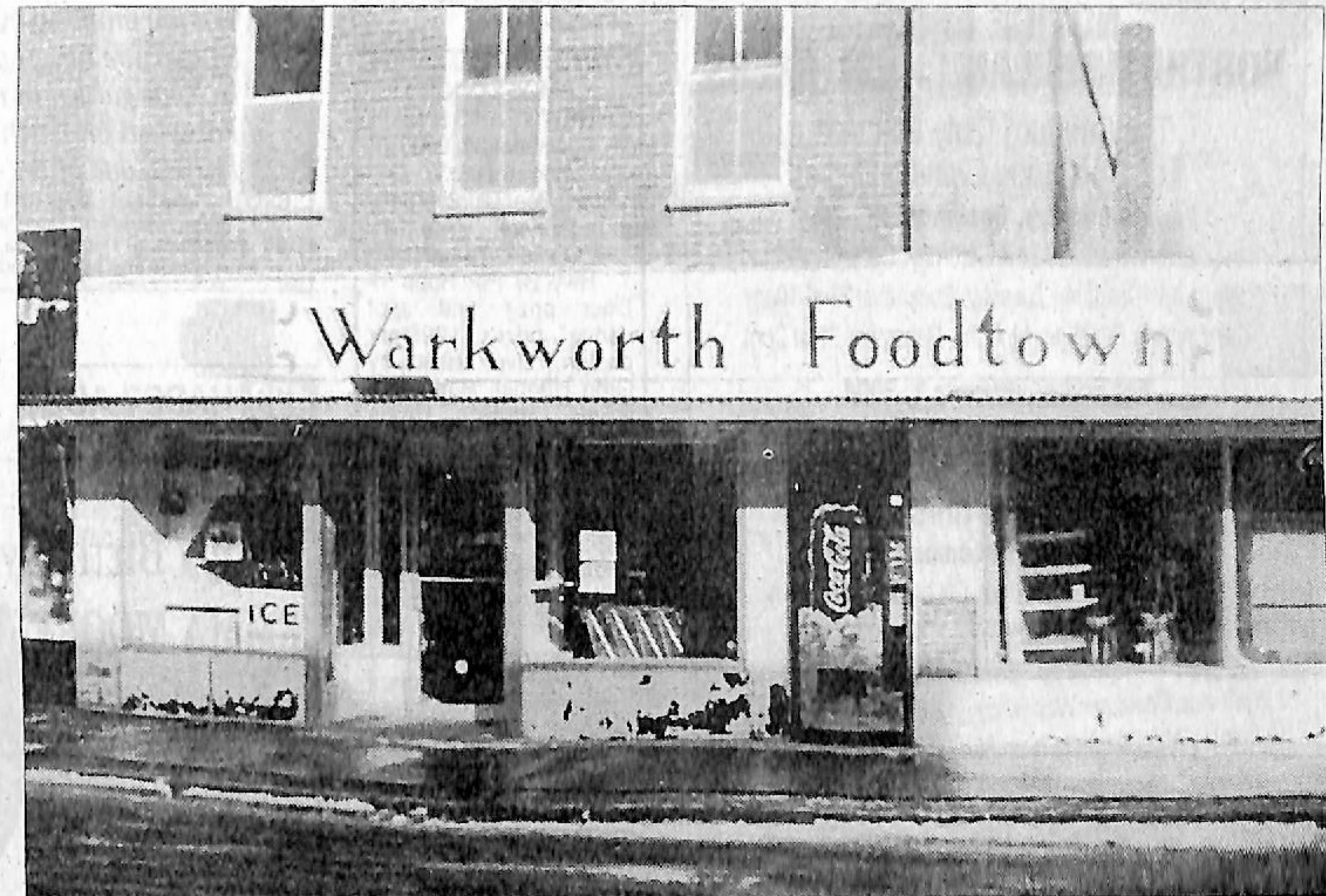
"That's just another reason people won't come to town," Marv Wrightly of the Warkworth Co Op says. "A grocery store is a real staple of the community."

He points out people are willing to drive a distance to patronize a big box store such as Wal-Mart or a No Frills - and they do it at the expense of a local grocery store.

"It's very unfortunate. It takes away a part of the glue that holds the community together," offered Northumberland MP Paul Macklin after hearing the news of the grocery store closure in Warkworth. For him, businesses such as a grocery store in a community such as Warkworth, are an example of the type of business which keeps his riding strong.

"My perspective is that small- and medium-sized business is the big employer," the MP says. "What we haven't done is to find out the problems they are experiencing and how the government can help."

Despite the closing of the grocery store, other local businesses see Warkworth as a bustling little arts community. The new visual and performing arts organization Spirit of the Hills frequently brings



Warkworth Foodtown, the small Northumberland County rural community's only grocery store, has closed its doors.

PHOTO BY SUZANNE ATKINSON

says. "It *does* make a difference. People were coming to town to shop."

She can recall a time not long gone when Warkworth had three grocery stores.

Ms. Evans is convinced a grocery store can exist profitably in Warkworth - it needs to be a regular, straightline-type of store offering a dependable, predictable and reputable grocery line up she says

"If it's here, they'll support it," she avers.

Jannine's Back-Talk Café is serviced by a Port Hope-based wholesaler. With the local grocery store gone, Ms. Evans now has to plan better, stock up on extras when

their basics" would have had a reinvestment in the past 20 years, he observes.

A grocery store in a smaller community "doesn't need to have a fresh fish counter but it does need a good range of groceries, fruits and vegetables," Professor Caldwell says.

In a community such as Warkworth also needs to offer an overall positive shopping experience, he says

"It needs to be as nice as Zehrs, except smaller. So much of it comes down to that. If the roof is leaking, it is probably not the world's greatest shopping experience. If it's rundown, it's not such a big deal to hop in the car.

"If you're looking just to run in and pick up something quick, so much the better to go small."

He questions, if the surrounding community is actually so strong, if it was a matter of economics which drove the grocery store out of Warkworth. While While former grocery owner Paul Dickson doesn't comment on that, Professor Caldwell adds that once one grocery store is gone, getting another up and running in a community the size of Warkworth is a major undertaking.

"It's a real dilemma. It may be the

