

# It's been a 60-year family run for Fox IGA

COLBORNE CHRONICLE  
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Mr. Fox has been considering selling for a couple of years now. His sons, Jamie and Gerry, aren't interested in the business. Otherwise, John says he would have continued the enterprise which started in Colborne over 60 years ago.

He admits it was tough to sign on the bottom line, but he knows it was the right decision. The grocery business has changed in the past few years. There is a lot more competition, which he admits is good for the consumer.

With the onset of the big stores, customer loyalty has flagged, he observes. Service used to be the byword. Now, it's price. With the focus on price, it has been more and more difficult for stores to maintain service standards. And, every time another store opens in the area, the local store does a little less.

There's little profit in it for the little guy, Mr. Fox notes. There are very few owner-operators left.

Now that Sobeys is taking over, John thinks it may be good for the village. There be dollars to invest in the store.

## Store opens after war

The Fox IGA story began when John's dad Bernard returned from World War II. Bernard opened a meat shop where Downey Pharmacy now has its flower shop. The business soon moved across King Street East in Colborne to where Lotsastuff is now located.

The Fox family was approached by the Wolf family about joining the IGA group of stores. Back in 1959, under the IGA banner, peanut butter was 39 cents a jar and a family-size package of fish and chips could be had for 49 cents.

By the mid-60s, the store was back on the north side of King Street East in Colborne. It remained there until John moved it to the present-day Toronto Road location on April 4, 1984. Peanut butter was now 99 cents. A ten-ounce package of haddock and chips was \$1.49.

John has worked in the store longer than anyone currently on staff.

He began at the age of eight when he wanted to earn enough money to buy a baseball. He jokes that once he had enough money in his pocket, he quit.

But, it wasn't for long.

While still in high school, he started in the meat room, alongside Don Prentice and Floyd Bilcox. After that, it was the grocery section, as he continued his apprenticeship under his father and grandfather.

It is a testimony to the family's



1954, south side of King Street East: The Fox grocery business had been flourishing for almost ten years, and had moved once when this picture was taken on the south side of King Street East in Colborne in 1954.



1965, north side of King Street East: In 1965, Fox IGA was based on the north side of King Street East, as the business continued to grow.

management that five of John's current staff members can trace their starts back more than 20 years to his previous location. Kate Marcellus, Marilyn Black, Marg Moore, Kathy Walker and Darrell McMurray all have long histories with the store and the Fox family. Other retired staffers, including Wayne McMurray and Don Prentice, go even further back. Old staff photos include a host of people who still call the Colborne area home.

And, they have stories to tell.

All recall the family atmosphere that has pervaded the store and the generosity of its owners.

Marilyn Black has been at the store 28 years. She recalls the staff picnics at John's place on the lakeshore where they lounged by the pool or played horseshoes. Don Prentice has fond memories of a bus trip they all took to Niagara Falls. Others remember trips to Kingston where the Fox family had a cottage.

Darrell McMurray walked into work after high school in 1978, starting work as a box boy. He's been at the store ever since and now manages the produce department.

## They all have stories.

Marilyn recalls the night they dressed up in their pyjamas for Midnight Madness. The offer was buy one pizza, get one free.

"It was a madhouse," she recounts. "We couldn't keep up — John and Fran and the rest of us, running around in pyjamas."

Pre-Christmas Fridays were on the minds of most of the long-serving staff. Details of those days remain clouded in mystery.

Lola Fox, John's mother, often made colour-coordinated uniforms for special occasions like Christmas, Thanksgiving and St. Patrick's Day.

Chatting at the door to the produce room, Darrell has lots to say.

There was the time the senior members on staff sent one of the kids to the hardware store for plaid paint. On another occasion, they sent someone with \$20 for elbow grease.

They tested one kid's gullibility when they sent him to the compressor room for a shelf stretcher. Apparently, the shelves weren't long enough to hold all the stock.

One of the boys was convinced he knew where the stairway was to a basement that didn't exist.

That "basement" was an ongoing source of fun as the new boys were sent there to find boxes.