

# Small-town store plans big celebration

NORTHUMBERLAND NEWS TODAY APR. 23/14

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Northumberland Today

VERNONVILLE — As great as small-town life is, it always seems better with a thriving little general store.

On April 26, the Shelter Valley Store will celebrate a year of just that.

While owners Melissa and Mike Holmes have enjoyed their first year in that particular business, they are not newcomers to the community. Melissa moved to the area as a young teenager and Mike grew up there, so both were aware (for example) that for some years the Vernonville store traditionally would stay open late the night fishing season opened.

Accordingly, on Friday night, they will be bring back that tradition by staying open until 11 p.m.

Speaking of tradition, that's basically why they bought the store, Melissa said.

Their previous work commitments kept them on the road and away from home. Wanting something better for their five-year-old son Merrick led them to buy the building at 2577 Shelter Valley Rd. some 18 months ago, put in extensive clean-up and restoration work, and open the store a year ago.

"We wanted to stay closer to the community. It was a good little family project for us," she said.

"I moved here from Mississauga, and came here kicking and screaming. I was thinking I didn't want to come. Now I long for the smallness of this community where you can walk down the streets.

"In the big city, you try not to look people in the eye. Here, everybody waves and says hi."

Their home is within quick and easy walking distance. And they've set up a playroom for Merrick in the back of the store, so it's a home away from home for the family.

Melissa considers it a wonderful way to support the community on a number of levels.

As a mother, she knows what local families need from a home-town store — a complete country market.

"Anybody can come in and pull together dinner at a reasonable price, and not have to run all the way into Cobourg," she said.

"I've been very aggressive at trying to keep my prices reasonable."

While she may not be able to compete with No Frills and Wal-



The Holmes family — Mike, Melissa and five-year-old Merrick — welcome you to the Shelter Valley Store to help them celebrate a year in business on April 26.

Mart, she believes her prices are at least comparable to the ones at Foodland and Sobey's.

And people can get more than groceries there.

Smoothies, Slushies and milkshakes are always on tap, and their hot-to-go lunches are proving popular — poutine, french fries, chicken fingers, hot dogs,

hamburgers.

People who put in a hard afternoon of work around the house can wander in for a quick lunch for themselves or their families. And in the summer, the patio and porch areas will offer a nice place to sit and relax with them.

They offer local firewood in the winter, and prepare gift baskets

for any occasion — her gluten-free foods are always a popular ingredient.

They also offer some things that are out of the ordinary, like the sauces they import from Florida with tropical flavours like mango and lime. But a lot of their inventory supports the local community as well.

Tubs of different Kawartha Dairy ice-cream flavours hint at summer days when an ice-cream cone is just what you crave.

Organic eggs and chickens from Peck Farms are in stock, as well as their corn when the time is right.

The fresh vegetables in season come from local growers, and

there's local honey on the shelves.

And in the freezers, she said, there's quite a selection of products from Sunnyside Country Markets in Colborne, including roasts, steaks, chicken, pork and sausages.

"You don't have to go all the way to Colborne to enjoy the luxury of Sunnyside," she said.

For that matter, you don't have to go to Campbellford, when you can get Empire Cheese in Vernonville.

A big celebration is planned for their anniversary on Saturday, and that's the kind of thing the family wants to do more of. On Canada Day, for example, they're planning a big yard sale in the back yard and breaking out the barbecue — which they may do more often for special occasions like long weekends.

Thinking about what she wants for her son, Melissa realized that Vernonville must become a place where people want to be. She has seen too many teenagers arranging rides to Cobourg, when they already live in such a wonderful community.

"Any moment we can get where we can just be here, that's where we want to be. And we are trying to make it so in the next generation — Merrick's generation — people from around here want to stay here," she said.

One step in that direction is their active support of the project that's just across the street from them: a playground for the Vernonville Community Centre.

The fundraising is on target, she reported.

Their store is selling tickets for a fundraising dance on May 31 (at the Alwnick Civic Centre, featuring Garage Dog), and they are holding a beer-bottle drive on April 26 as part of their anniversary celebration. Between the two, she expects, the project will meet its goal.

But that's just part of the fun in store April 26. Mike will be barbecuing ribs with a variety of the barbecue sauces they carry, so it's a great chance to sample such flavours as Road Kill and Redneck Whiskey Wing Sauce.

You can also buy smoked meat as a special treat, and there will be free cake, hot dogs, Slushies and prizes. The store will be open from 8 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.

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