

John Farrell honoured for 50 years in the hardware business

By Barb McKay

John Farrell is a staple in Kincardine's hardware industry.

Last Monday, the past owner of Kincardine Home Hardware was recognized for his 50 years of dedicated service to the hardware trade at a Home Hardware Fall Market and semi-annual stakeholders meeting in St. Jacobs. He was awarded Estwing Golden Hammer, along with awards from Home Hardware and the National Retail Hardware Association.

Farrell's involvement in the hardware business happened by chance when he was just 14 years old. A few months following his father's death the family moved from east of Tiverton into Kincardine. On his way home from high school one fall day Farrell walked past J.G. Ellenton and Son Hardware on Queen Street, where B & W Appliances is now located, when Roy Ellenton asked him to give him a hand. Before he knew it, he had a job as a merchandiser.

Hardware stores operated quite differently than they do today, Farrell said.

"At the time there was income tax and everything was done

in your head," he said. "Everyone got a hand written receipt."

There were sticks of dynamite in the basement and blasting caps in the safe upstairs. The store was heated by a woodstove. Merchandise was brought in on a train, but more often than not store shelves were stocked with items brought in by travelling salesmen; everything from paint to kitchen hardware.

In 1967, the business became Ellenton Home Hardware. Three years later, Farrell married and he and his wife Mary moved into the apartment above the store. In 1976 the business moved from private ownership to a limited company and Farrell was able to purchase shares. In 1981, the couple purchased the business and then, a few years later, the building. They expanded the building, but soon outgrew and built new in 1988 on Highway 21, where Home Hardware still operates today. The staff had increased from three people to 17 and business was booming.

"Because of available parking our average sales increased dramatically," Farrell said.

Owning a business did come with challenges. When the Farrells

purchased the hardware business interests rates were at 22 per cent.

"We learned restraint," he said.

When the new store was built Ontario Hydro was closing down its heavy water operation. Local residents were also using restraint.

"Those were some of our best times, because people weren't buying, they were renovating," Farrell said.

Working with family also had its drawbacks, he noted with a smile, but it was pretty great. Farrell's daughter Peggy started at Kincardine Home Hardware as a teenager and has continued there, while his daughter Sarah works at the hardware store in Ripley. His youngest, Valerie works as a bookkeeper in Burlington.

In 1999, the couple decided to sell the business. Mary retired but John stayed on as a part-time receiver.

"We wanted to slow down," said Farrell. "We weren't good at delegating so we worked a lot of hours. It was for health reasons as well."

There have been no regrets.

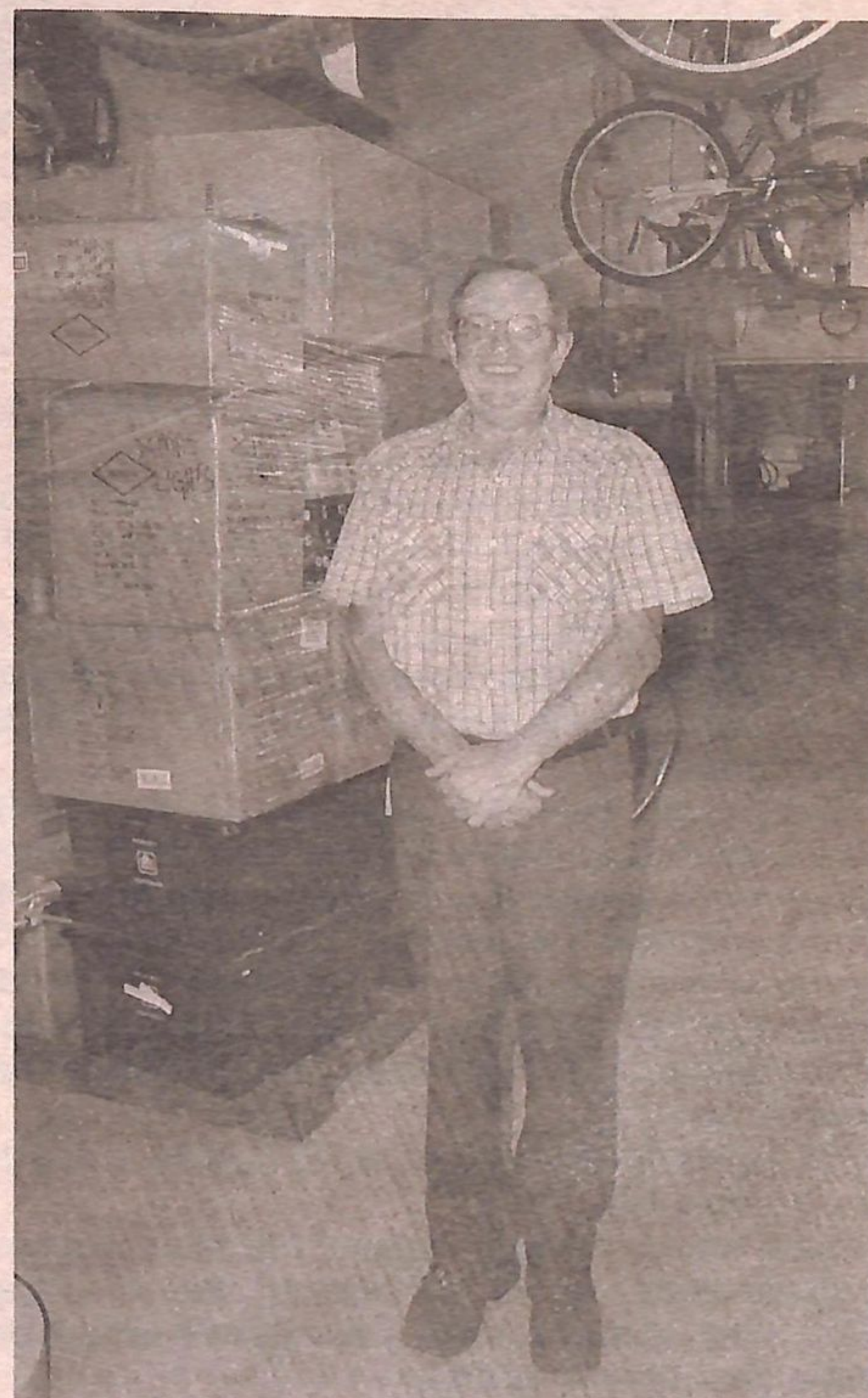
"We are able to take trips and spend time with our children and grandchildren," he said. "I highly recommend slowing down at 50."

Although Farrell hasn't exactly slowed down. While he may not be in the hardware store on a full-time basis he has plenty to occupy his time. He and Mary have travelled the world over the past decade, visiting Europe, Egypt, Russia, Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii, among other destinations. This fall they will travel to the United Arab Emirates and India. In the summer Farrell golfs and plays bagpipes with the Kincardine Scottish Pipe Band. He also volunteers with the Kincardine Legion, is a member of the Russell Meadows Non-Profit Housing board of directors and is a member of the Huron Fringe Field Naturalists. In the winter he enjoys curling and woodcarving.

The couple is now free to spend more time with their grandchildren. They chauffeur three boys to hockey practices and travel with grandchildren to 4H events.

"We are quite pleased with the way our lives have turned out," Farrell said.

The family will hold a come and go tea at the Kincardine Legion on Oct. 13 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. to celebrate his 50-year achievement.



John Farrell, former owner of Kincardine Home Hardware, was recently honoured for 50 years in the hardware business. (Barb McKay photo)