

Long-time Chesley grocers, Verne and Shirley Bohlender, plan to retire

by Mary Golem

In 1962, when Verne Bohlender set out on his own in the grocery business, Chesley had five grocery stores, two bake shops, two butcher shops, two shoe stores, two hardware stores, a drug store, a dairy bar, two doctors and no library.

The loss of most of those businesses over the years and the effect those losses had on Chesley's business section are just some of the changes Verne and Shirley Bohlender have seen in their 32 years of business.

The Bohlenders have decided it's time to retire. The store is for sale and as soon as existing stock is sold, they will join the ranks of the retired.

For Verne Bohlender, working in a grocery store has been a life-long career. He started working with his father, Harvey, the manager of the Dominion store in Hanover, when he was only 15 years old. When the opportunity arose in 1962, he bought Carl Marklevitz's Red and White store in Chesley (now McIntee Real Estate location) and in 1970, purchased his present store location from Grant

Dobson.

Over the years, Verne says he has "met some wonderful people" and "although we've never been rich, we own what we have and we've enjoyed what we have done!"

"The town's been good to us . . . oh sure, we've grumbled about things over the years, but we have always found the councils have done their best to look after our interests."

And now, as he prepares for his retirement, Verne looks back on his 32 years in business in Chesley and shares the changes he has seen.

"I think more people shopped in town years ago," he said. "Years ago, Alf Woods was our delivery man and he'd make several trips a day for us, and for the other grocers, delivering groceries. You don't see that now."

"Our overall trade hasn't been as big the past few years due to big business opposition," he continued. "But we always wanted to - and always did - remain independent. That's one of the biggest changes I've seen," he continued. "Years ago, the wholesalers used to help small businesses grow. But in

the last few years, they have thought only of themselves and have been no help to the little guy."

When more businesses were independent, Bohlender believes "the town worked together better".

"Big business will soon be putting little guys like us out of sight and that's a shame," he added. "Computers, electronics and all that cannot replace the human element and that's what the customer really wants - they want personalized service, they want someone to talk to them."

Bohlender adds some of the best memories he will have of his years in business will be the people he and his wife have met over the years. "We have had good, loyal customers. They have become like family to us - and they are the ones who are the happiest for us that we are retiring and going to do something different."

"I have no regrets," he continued. "This business has been good to us!"

Bohlender says over the years he has had people complain about the high cost of food. "Food today is cheaper in relation to wages than it

ever was."

Think about this, he said, as he talked about the price of food in the early 1940's when the minimum wage was just 16 cents an hour. Then two loaves of bread sold for 15 cents, butter was 40 cents a pound, bologna was 25 cents a pound, summer sausage was 40 cents a pound, a quart of milk cost 11 cents, eggs were 32 cents a dozen.

Today, with the minimum wage at \$6.70 an hour, bread is 99 cents a loaf, butter is \$3.39 a pound, bologna is \$2.89 a pound, summer sausage sells for \$5.50 a pound, eggs are \$1.59 a dozen and milk is \$1.63 a litre.

"When you take into consideration today's wages, the price of food today is not high."

Over the years, both Verne and Shirley say they have been blessed with "good employees" - people like Pat Mason, Edna Galbraith, Ruth Gobert, Ron Bluhm, Rick Gateman, Dennis Witzke, Doreen Cook, Madeline Pegelo, Lorraine Sweiger and Jim Loucks, to name just a few.

The couple's three children also helped out in their parents' store - daughter Deborah, who now lives with her husband, Ron Carroll in New York; son, Mark, who works with a Calgary telephone company and lives with his wife, Cindy and three children in Calgary and son, David, a resident astronomer in Hawaii. He and his wife, Elaine, have a two-year-old son, Riley.

Since 1970, Verne and Shirley have only managed two holidays and so during retirement they hope to have time to relax and enjoy life. Verne enjoys his ham radio and computer, along with copying old photographs, and says repairs to their home will no doubt occupy some of his time.

Shirley, who has worked along with her husband in the store for the past nine and a half years, will continue packing clothing for needy Indian children in northern Ontario and Manitoba.

Initially, a project of her church group, Shirley took on the task of packaging used clothing several years ago and has been doing it ever since.

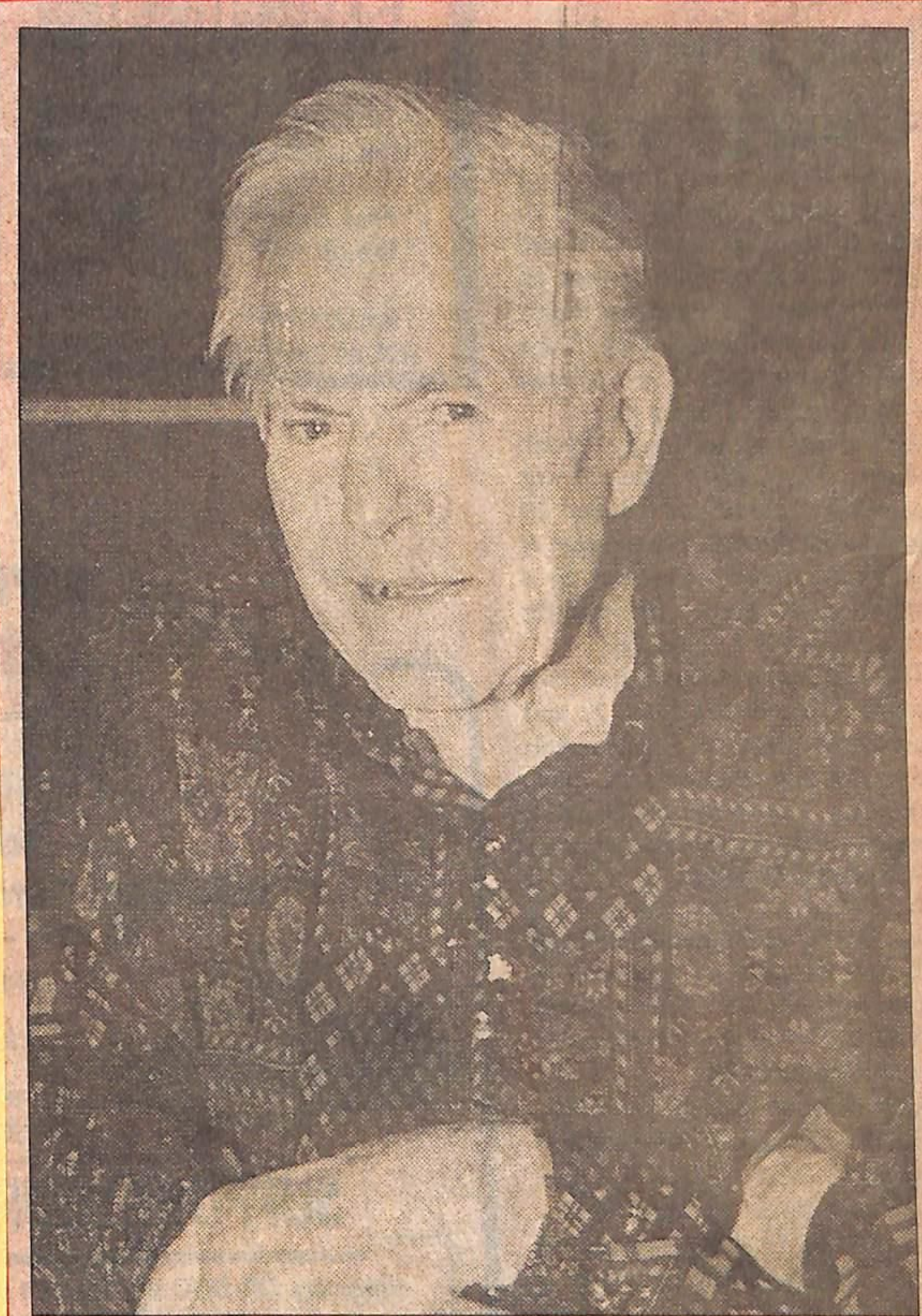
Each week, five or six boxes are shipped from the Bohlender home.

"We're going to miss the store and the people we've met over the years, but we're also happy to be retiring. We've made a lot of friends and met a

lot of interesting people over the years and that's the nicest part," Shirley concluded.

The Enterprise joins the community in wishing Verne and Shirley a happy, fun-filled and healthy retirement!!

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A well-known, life-long Chesley resident, Howard Krug, celebrated his 90th birthday on September 24, 1994. The former president of the Krug Bros. furniture company in Chesley, a furniture manufacturing business started by his father, Christian, Howard headed his class at the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Toronto in 1926, and then began working in the family business. His responsibilities there included forest management and design work. An avid conservationist, Howard owns extensive bush properties, including the Krug bush lot at Kinghurst in Sullivan Township. An avid bird-watcher, he is a founding and honorary member of the Saugeen Field Naturalists and was a founding member and former president of the Chesley Kinsmen Club. Always actively involved and interested in the community, Howard is one of the town's best known citizens and all of us join in wishing him a very happy 90th birthday! (Golem photo)



Verne and Shirley Bohlender (Golem photo)