

Variety Street...

Georgetown, Ontario

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Let's go on record right now with the fact that Georgetown, our market survey area for this month, is distinctly not a variety town. Apart from the fact that a single variety store is located inside the town limits, — and an excellent variety outlet it is, too — the tiny town just thirty-six miles from Toronto is too 'specialized' in its retail outlets to qualify. Now, that statement takes a bit of explaining — and we propose to do just that — but later!

At this moment, we must also clarify the statement about this little spot being a retailer's dream. It is, and to make that picture really clear let's talk to Walter Evans, secretary of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce.

High Payroll

Georgetown has one of the highest per capita payrolls in Canada," says Mr. Evans. And this is no rosy statement, born of C. of C. enthusiasm. It's a fact! Furthermore, its fact recounted to Canadian Variety Merchandising by almost every merchant we talked to.

Georgetown's per capita payroll is so high, in fact, that a new plant which was scheduled for location here, was built in Guelph instead. The company figured hourly wage rates were 25c less there, with a ready labour supply into the bargain. Ask any retailer to translate that into terms of potential business and he'll be able to do it for you without a second's hesitation. That's the kind of market every retail man hopes to hit! But there's still another facet to the situation.

No Lay-off Trouble

In most industrial centres, no matter whether they're large or small, the condition we have just described obtains. But there's usually a catch. Very frequently layoffs occur among the industrial groups — and the retail sales curve goes down, down, whenever it does. Not in Georgetown, though. It's pleasant indeed to be able to report such a situation, but there it is.

Diversification is the answer, of course. There are nineteen industries either in or very close to Georgetown. Their products range all the way from machinery to mushrooms — from laminated boats to children's furniture. You have your choice from knitting and paper mills to bottling works. The breadwinners of Georgetown families may be employed in a quarry or a ceramics plant — but the point is, they are all employed.

"Even during the depression years," said one merchant, "the number of unemployed wage earners in Georgetown was way below that of other communities in relation to population." "We've always been fortunate in that respect, and of course, I believe that is because there is a variety of industries in the town."

Good Living Standard

Obviously this is no metropolis — population is slightly in excess of 4,500 — but it's a happy, and economically healthy centre, that's for sure. As you would logically expect in a town which lives under the conditions described, the citizens are able to afford a good living standard. An estimated seventy five per cent of the inhabitants own the homes in which they live. Although there are no figures available on the number of cars (brought down to a per capita basis) in the area, the ratio is high — very high and there are few families without. A car turns out to be a real necessity in some cases, for they may live and maintain their families in Georgetown, some of the wage earners are employed in the big Ford plant in Oakville, roughly twenty miles away. Others are working in Milton, and commute from that centre back and forth to their homes in the centre of the rich farming district.

Also a Parking Problem

All of this is very nice indeed. BUT as you may have guessed it creates something of a problem. Problem is parking space — the old perennial which pops up to pestier retailers in communities large or little. It's here in Georgetown! We've heard many a man who should know better scoff at the idea of a centre the size of Georgetown having a parking problem, but that's the way it works. Remember how far the average shopper will walk between car and store? Well the shoppers in Georgetown are just as averse to walking a long distance between the two, as the inhabitants of any other town or city. Curbside parking is frankly at a premium in this hundred year old community.

"We can't seem to get the retailers together on the parking question," says Chamber secretary Evans. "The retailers feel that they cannot be expected to pay for off-street parking which will benefit the general public. The council takes the stand that it will benefit the retailers, so they ought to get together and pay for off-street parking, since they are the ones who will ultimately benefit the most." Vacant land is available, according to Mr. Evans, and he expects that it will not be too long before the retailers do move in this direction.

Almost No Tourists

Though Georgetown is on heavily travelled Highway No. 7, passing traffic doesn't hit the town's business section, but by-passes it completely. "Though we are on the edge of the Caledon Hills, and close to the Credit Valley, which does have tourist appeal, we get almost no tourist business. This, as you may well imagine,

in an industrial town, provides no source of grief whatever. The inhabitants are too busy going about their jobs to make any kind of play for tourist business.

The town is however, going in heavily for development of its present population figure. "Obsolete now," said Mr. Evans when we mentioned the provincial estimate we had seen.

Real Estate Developments

The development is in an eastward direction — and it's fairly extensive — with every prospect of becoming more so. An 1800-acre area has been bought up by a real estate development organization, and the area has been taken into the town limits. New homes are springing up — so much so that a thirty acre area has been set aside for a shopping centre. "That is for the day when our population is 10,000 though," said Mr. Evans, at the same time intimating that the time might be fairly close at hand. At the moment, Georgetown has the lowest mill rate of any town of comparable size — 45 mills on equalized assessment — which looks like a fair size inducement. The town is, after all, on the main line of the CNR just thirty five rail miles from the heart of Toronto.

Plans 38 Years Ago

Says the Georgetown Herald of 1917 "Georgetown is in such close proximity to Toronto as to afford quick and frequent communication. A distance of only 29 miles, it is possible to visit the city, to attend concerts, lectures, theatres, etc at a small cost. And speaking of transportation, it is encouraging to note that our present one company method of transportation will soon be supplemented by the opening of the Toronto Suburban Electric Railway from the Queen City through to Guelph and Western Ontario. The advent of the electric road will provide a more frequent means of transportation, and also probably a less expensive means."

So much for things 38 years ago — when the assessment roll showed Georgetown's population to be 1,885, and the total assessment of the village was \$629,000. The community has come a long way in the interim.

Not a Variety Town

We said some time ago that this is not a variety town. It is not indeed. Retailing is centred along Main St which is intersected by Mill Street, on which the variety store is located. We'd like to tell you a little about the Georgetown 5c to \$1.00 store on Mill Street before we go on to talk to the other merchants, however. It is owned and operated by C. R. Wray, and though the store is not tremendously large, it is a tremendously good example of a well organized, well operated variety unit. The counters and wall shelves which feature the merchandise are pin neat. Displays are simply done, yet are particularly effective. With more than 7,000 items in stock, Mr. Wray (who is chairman of the Retail Merchants' Association), keeps his counters in tip-top shape. His is a good business — there are always people in the store — and "we try to keep our customers happy — we always exchange merchandise and give refunds if the goods aren't satisfactory," says Mr. Wray. "This is a good community in which to do business," he reported.

Retail Outlet — Garners

Over the rise of Mill Street, and

on to Main, one of the first stores is Garner's — an outlet which specializes in personal and household dry goods. Merchant Garner a pleasant easy-going man who operates a store in Erin reported the same story as the others to whom we had talked.

"Business on an even keel — no pronounced peaks or valleys in volume, except on a seasonal basis, of course," said Mr. Garner. "A stable employment picture for the working people of Georgetown." Asked if there was a noticeable pull away from town by reason of its proximity to Toronto, Mr. Garner remarked "I think that is true of every centre to some extent. The Georgetown shoppers may go to Guelph, but the Guelph shoppers may go on to Kitchener... and so it goes that way. But similarly, shoppers from Brampton do shop in Georgetown, to some extent, so there you are!"

Thompson's Hardware

Further along the street, we queried hardware man Ray Thompson. Mr. Thompson corroborated the general stability of business in town. An attractive and well-stocked store, Thompson's Hardware, we observed was another unit in which customers are always found.

North along Main, the Eaton Order Office is to be found, with the familiar Company signature on the front, and familiar catalogues and order blanks inside the tidy, small office.

Silver's Apparel

Across the street, almost immediately opposite is a large and smartly fronted ready to wear store Silver's is almost a department store, certainly the bulk of family needs in personal apparel are available here. Silver's operates a store in Brampton in addition to the Georgetown unit. Also located on the east side of the street is the Simpson Sears Order Office — and it too follows the pattern of company offices across the country.

A Solid Town

The stores we have listed are by no means in the variety category. We talked to management in each case however, knowing that the problems of one retailer (basically) are the problems of all. This quiet little community goes on and grows apace. There is no visible bursting at the seams, there is no problem so acute that it hits the visitor as soon as he strikes the town boundary. Council and retailers will get together on that parking problem, it is possible there may be a change in the 1 o'clock Thursday afternoon closing (some want it changed — not too many). Seldom will you find a less excitable group of people for the retailers of Georgetown know they're in a happy position. They accept the fact gratefully — and they see no reason to fuss and fume about the odd difficulty they encounter in doing business.

Georgetown is not a variety town in the sense we usually apply it — it's a solid town — and as one of the retailers phrases it — it's a nice community, in which everybody gets a square deal."

L.O.L. 68

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