

Roth shares the secrets to his 44 years of success

Orville Roth celebrates a lifetime of business

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SILVERTON — On Sept. 10, 1950, at the age of 16, Orville Roth donned his first white shirt and green bow tie in a Salem independent grocery store. More than half a century later, he still wears the same getup almost every day.

With a 1956 Chevrolet and \$500 in his pocket, Roth opened the first grocery store bearing his namesake where Ace Hardware now resides on McClaine Street on Aug. 5, 1962. Forty-four years later, the local entrepreneur celebrates his business successes with 11 stores scattered across Salem, Independence, Lebanon, Stayton, Silverton and McMinnville.

According to Roth, the crux of his success lies with two essential rules: providing quality products and quality service.

“Today, we’re able to compete with the WalMarts and the WinCos because we have that quality of products and that quality of service,” he said. “It costs a bit more to have quality products, but it’s worth it.”

And, Roth explained, he constantly fights to make his stores the best possible.

“There are three things I hate: being late, waiting in line and losing,” he said. “So as you see the challenges of the industry today, there’s a challenge in becoming something special. But we’re successful because we follow the same basic plan as we did 44 years ago.”

As with many family businesses ownership has been passed on through bloodlines. Roth’s son, Michael, became the company’s president in 1997 and then CEO in 2001. Roth, then, dropped his work week from 80 or more hours a week to 40, when he became Roth’s Chairman and Chief Courtesy Clerk. That is, on almost any given morning, customers can find Roth visiting with patrons and employees or sipping tea and nibbling at a doughnut.

“A doughnut a day keeps the doctor away,” he said.

But with the shift in management, customers aren’t bound to notice any change in what Roth calls the “basic services.” The changes are in technology

“I was successful in the 20th century,” he said. “The 21st century belongs to the next generation, and technology is simply a part of everyday life.”

He said that the switch from simple cash registers to computers was a large change for the business, and he also mentioned that Michael has taken sincere interest in the bakery and in ways that doughnuts are made. And while Roth's isn't planning on implementing the gas station or car wash found at the Silverton branch in any other stores, he said that their experience with Silverton's branch has taught them how to cross-merchandise to make that aspect more successful.

"It's hard to be perfect," he said, "but I'm trying my best to fill the gap."