

Member Profile

By Richard Allen

Richie's Market: A Dollar Bay Landmark For Over 40 Years

A lot of businesses, including three mills, have opened and closed their doors in the Upper Peninsula's Dollar Bay region over the years, but Richie's Market has continued to weather the often stormy economic barometer for 42 years.

"I'm not sure many people believed I would make a go of it when I opened the store in the spring of 1958," said owner Richard 'Richie' Norlin. "After all, I had no money, very little inventory and a future that was uncertain to say the least." Richie began stocking the shelves with items most in demand, including lunch meats, bread and milk, bakery items and ice cream products, to mention a few. "We didn't have the packaged foods we have today, so most everything had to be fresh.

The son of Swedish parents, Richie worked the day shift at the Copper County Dairy that year. "Somebody told me the store was up for sale. It was ideally located on Main Street near M-26, but the owner had allowed his inventory to become depleted to nearly nothing and he was often closed during peak business hours. I discussed it with

my parents and they volunteered to mortgage their house so I could make the down payment," Richie stated. "It was difficult at first because I had to win back customers who were going elsewhere by that time. I remodeled the business, added to the inventory and hired a clerk to run the business while I worked at the dairy during the day and I worked the store at nights and weekends."

When Richie bought the store, he had tough competition from Dollar Bay's other supermarkets. "Today, I'm the only one left with the exception of a convenience store/gas station.

Richie's Market is rich in history. The building was originally built as a school house located six miles out of town. "My mother attended that country school back in the 1920s. Her cousin purchased the building sometime during the 1940s and had it moved to its present location. He had it remodeled into a cafe and it functioned as a restaurant for about ten years under three different owners until it was converted into a market," Richie recalled.

Richie and his wife, Theresa, of

nearby Hancock, were married in 1966, and Theresa became a permanent part of the business. "Two of our three sons helped out quite a bit when we needed them," he said. The Norlins continue to work hard to provide service to their regular customers. The market is open seven days a week, closing only on Christmas day. "Our business has increased each year but tapered off somewhat with the opening of supermarkets in Hancock and Houghton," Richie noted.

For years, the market thrived evenings and Sundays when most supermarkets were closed. Richie pointed out that packaged liquor sales have slowed somewhat, although beer and wine sales are increasing. "You have to stock what people want or they won't come back. Service is everything, especially today with the competition so stiff. If you can't compete, you're going to go broke!" he quipped.

Richie admits his wife was the mainstay of the market for many years. "I worked for years at the dairy and I also worked part-time at the Dollar Bay post office. I retired from the postal service in 1996 with nearly 30 years of service. Up here, you do what you have to do to earn a living." Interestingly enough, Richie admits he's been so busy he hasn't been in lower Michigan in over 40 years!

Richie's Market has been a member of the Michigan Licensed Beverage Association for 24 years, making it one of the oldest off-premise member businesses.

At age 67, Richie admits he still enjoys working the business although he no longer works long hours these days. "I don't know how many more years we'll keep the business. Each year I keep saying to myself maybe a couple more years and I'll retire. I guess Theresa and I will keep at it until we no longer enjoy it."

