

Sisters remembers Edith Leithauser

By **Bonnie Malone**
Correspondent

“She was the first person I met when we moved here, and wanted to know everything about me,” said a 50-year resident of Sisters and friend of Edith Leithauser.

That was Edith’s style. There was never a more friendly, happy, or interested person in Sisters history.

The character of Maude, in the 1970s cult movie “Harold and Maude” could have been inspired by Edith Leithauser. “You really like people, don’t you, Maude?” asked Harold. Maude looked at him with an impish grin and responded, “They’re my species.” That was the philosophy of Edith.

Leithauser, a resident of Sisters for nearly 75 years, died on December 2. She and her husband, Pete, left an imposing heritage on what has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in Oregon.

Leithauser family influence has graced Sisters since 1911, when Pete’s grandfather opened a barber shop on the corner of Fir Street and Cascade Avenue. In 1941, Edith and Pete acquired the Leithauser Grocery from his

father, who had opened the market in the early 1920s in the former barber shop.

The Leithausers raised five children in the back of their grocery store, which eventually encompassed the current Sisters Bakery, Sisters Drug & Gift and Melvin’s Fir Street Market, as both the family and the grocery expanded.

The couple had a profound effect on their Catholic faith, rodeo, and social life in Sisters Country.

The family attended St. Thomas Catholic Church in Redmond until they and other local Catholics influenced the church to build St. Edward the Martyr Catholic Church in Sisters. One of their sons was the first altar boy.

The church, first established on the corner of Larch and Cascade (across from the elementary school tennis courts), was moved to Trinity Way in the 1970s. At both locations, Edith traditionally sat in an aisle seat by which all parishioners passed after receiving communion. She had her reasons. From this vantage point, she was able to smile and greet every single church member every week for seven decades.

The thing about Edith,

as anyone who knew her would tell you, is that she was always smiling, always interested in children and the status of families and sure to know where there was need and how she could help.

She was a natural, therefore, behind the counter of a grocery store, where she could converse with customers and keep up on local news. Every year, before school opened, she checked with the school district to learn what school supplies were needed so Leithauser Supermarket would have those supplies in stock, down to number of crayons in a box. There were always several sets of supplies stored in the backroom to quietly donate to children whose families were financially strapped.

“She was always so nice,”



PHOTO BY BILL MINTIENS

Edith Leithauser had a big impact on the shaping of Sisters.

recalled Ray Hennings, who was a regular shopper. “She always took time for everybody.”

As a dedicated parent and volunteer, Edith was among the volunteers who passed out “sugar pills” of the first polio vaccine to Sisters youth. She was very proud to own the

first automatic dishwasher in Sisters, declaring that her kids never go sick because she owned that machine.

“We had to wash every single dish before we could load the washer,” said her daughter, Karen Marsh. “They were

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