

Hilyard Street couple says goodbye

Don Brooke stands up and uncaps a bottle of Grignolino to let it breathe. He looks through the glass doors of his 19th Avenue home and gazes out toward the neat backyard full of flowers.

"In all these years, I've probably had a one-week vacation," he muses. "We're going to take two weeks off for every year we've been in business and then see what happens after that."

Don and Jeanette Brooke, owners of the Hilyard Street Market at the corner of 17th Avenue and Hilyard Street are bidding the University adieu after almost 31 years of trading in this area. On July 1, they will hand over their business to Larry and Jerry Swartz who have promised, "not to change a thing."

Don, 62, and Jeanette, 61, have made the market more than a neighborhood store to its customers. It could in fact be listed on campus maps as a place to go for friendly talk, a rare bottle of wine or a specialty food from far-away countries. And friends

By NICK GALLO
Of the Emerald

they have made, including two students who recently printed up an illustration of the market's storefront as part of their wedding invitation.

"We're getting married March 20," the student wrote the Brookes. "Since we met by the wagon wheel in front of your shop, we decided to immortalize the scene on our wedding invitation."

"The students have just been great to us," says Jeanette. "But frankly we're tired. We've been working six days a week and a few hours on Sundays, too. Now we're in the position to do some things we've wanted to do for a long time."

Inside the Hilyard Street Market, over 1,000 wines line the walls or wait in the wine cellar in the back. Although they carry a number of expensive wines, the Brookes have tried to make sure 80 per cent of the wines are in the \$2-\$5 class.

"Too much of wine-drinking is snobbery," sighs Don. "People should look at it as a good food. They should be more selective of whom they drink with rather than which wine they drink."

And a lot of the credit for their wine selection belongs to the University community, says Don. "There's so many different people here, so many different countries. Probably 200 of the wines we have are a result of foreign students and visiting professors telling us what they miss from their home countries."

It seems like the Brookes and the Hilyard Street Market have been fated for one another. In high school, Don worked there part-time and when he returned from World War II, he and Jeanette bought the present store. But then Don was recalled by the Navy when the Korean conflict broke out and they had to sell the market. When Don returned from overseas they bought another market at the corner of 19th Avenue and Agate Street. But in 1969, there



Don and Jeanette Brooke

Photo by Tim Patrick

they were again, the once-again owners of the Hilyard Street shop.

Immediately, the Brookes added a few personal touches. New York-style lights from the 1920s line the store's entrance. Stained-glass windows went in on the side so that the reflected colors spread across the shop's floors during the day. And the Brookes filled every bare spot on the shelves.

"This store has been kind of like the bumblebee," Don says. "According to the rules of aerodynamics it can't fly. Well, you look at the size of our store and you'd think it was impossible to do the kind of volume we do."

That volume could be one of the highest per square foot for any grocery in Eugene, he points out. On Memorial Day he hands out fortune cookies to customers as a way of counting shoppers. They usually number close to 2,000. Which is why the Brookes maintain that the day of the little neighborhood store is not dead.

"We're not impersonal like the big stores," says Don. "I see medium-sized stores to be the trend for the future. We wanted to find people who would keep the store the way it is. I just wouldn't want to turn the store over to a fast food franchise because the students deserve better."

And the Brookes plan on taking something of

their store with them when they retire, that is they'll visit some of their former customers from all over the world.

"This store has been a helluva good course in world history," smiles Don. "I feel like I've got the equivalent of a Ph.D. in history." So, they'll head for Quebec, Europe, maybe even Africa to look up old friends. And in addition, they'll do some fishing. Jeanette says she is anxious to get their 18-foot twin-engine motor boat out in the water.

Don adds that maybe he'll even write a book. ("I've got a brother who writes books and I think I'll show him how to write," he laughs.) It'll be "semi-informational", but include anecdotes of a shopkeeper.

"One time a little kid came in here and I gave him a piece of candy," Don recalls. "His mother looked alarmed that he hadn't said 'thank you' so she dragged him back over to me and said, 'What do you say to the nice man?' The little kid looked up and said, 'I've got three brothers'."

But one thing for sure is that the Brookes won't be cutting their ties with the University. Although they are selling their business, they will continue to own the building. And there are the poker games that Don plays with five college professors which have been going on for "28 or 29" years.

"There's no way I'll give those up," he smiles.

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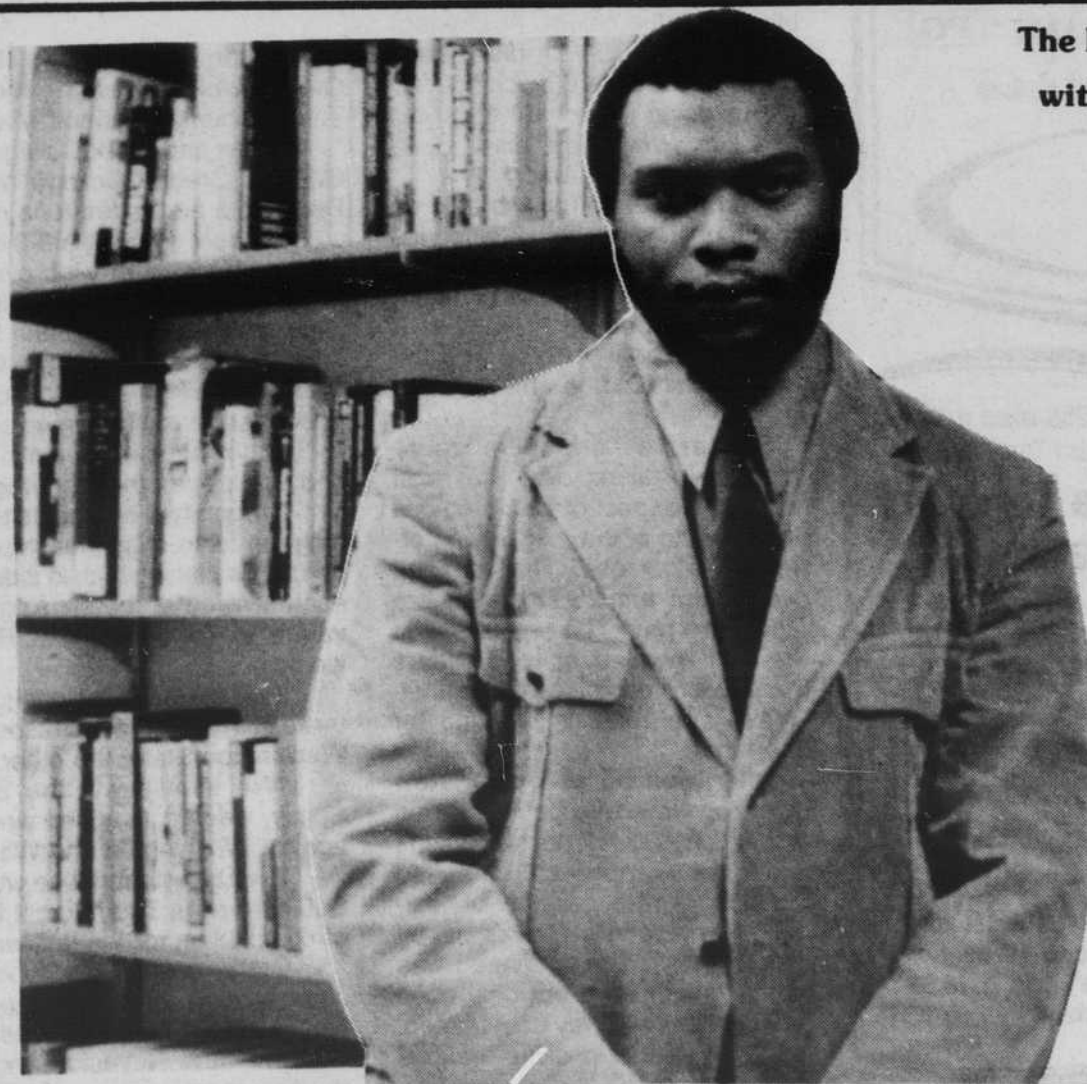
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