

Family Owned Businesses



Old Mill Farm Store embraces past, looks to future

COTTAGE GROVE
SENTINEL STAFF REPORT

Over the Old Mill Farm Store's more than 160 years of service to the Cottage Grove area, it has survived seven major fires and a multitude of different owners.

Today, Debbie Lavios and Charles McLeod run the store in a way they feel retains a family-based approach, if a little more globally-minded.

"It's the two of us and then our grandkids and our adult children," Lavios said. "We've been blessed over the last few years. Our oldest grandsons have been

involved with the local football team. So we get to hire a bunch of big, brawny football players and a bunch of family."

For much of the store's history, it ground grains to various specifications, shoed horses and cut wood for the local populace.

Sometime around the middle of last century, it began serving the pet market as well.

"Now in our ownership we serve the pet market and the livestock market," said Lavios. "And a few local human products on the side."

Lavios and McLeod have been running the store for

20 years and proudly sell products which are pro-organic and pro-local; there's no shyness in talking about this with customers.

"That's been really fun to interact with a variety of ages on how you might go about making better food choices for your body or better food choices for our global body," Lavios said.

The co-owners can find anything from hamster to elephant food if needed. On the shelves, the animal feed runs the gamut of goats, sheep, horses, cows, ducks, chickens and a menagerie of other animals one might find in their home or on a

farm. "Since 1853, this business has truly survived just about everything this nation has gone through," Lavios said. "This store has kept going."

Lavios chalks their success up to the deep relationship between human and animals and a bit of their own quirky quaintness.

"We're slightly different from others," Lavios said. "As far as we know, we're only one of two feed stores that has their own piano. And we encourage all our folks to play it when they have time."

Boyce & Sons — one-stop home supply with familiar faces

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If you have been to Boyce & Sons in the last 20 years, and went again today, chances are, you would see a familiar face.

"He's been here 20 years; my number one driver has been with me over 30 years; the two counter guys have been here pushing 20 years," said Rick Boyce as he rattles off list of employees at Boyce & Sons. "We've got the same crew we've had forever and ever and ever."

While a key group of workers has served as the backbone of the company through its growth, the flip-side has been the group of loyal customers that keep coming back for more. Or just come to the store to chat.

"I've had (people) tell me,

'Yeah, I'd be going down the road having a bad day and I just think of this store and I start laughing because it's fun here.' We make it fun so they pull in. Whether it's people that are customers or people that I buy from or whatever," said Rick. "It's big enough but small enough. When you get too big, you lose the people. The coming just to (talk) and laugh and joke and have fun."

Before the business became the one-stop shop for homeowners, Bill Boyce, father of both Rick (who serves as president and CEO) and Darin (general manager of the company) opened Boyce & Sons in 1969 as a sawdust and bark mulch business.

"Back then a lot of people used it for horse bedding and heat. Heat was a big part of our business. You don't see it anymore but it was really



good, nice for heat," remembers Rick who helped with the business as a sophomore in high school when it first opened.

In the early 1980s Rick became business partners with his dad and then bought him out so that his dad could retire — in theory, at least. Rick began to expand the business to now where it now includes a little of everything: lumber, plywood, hardware, concrete, windows, doors and more.

As Rick eyes an eventual

retirement, he has tried to scale-back his weekly hours from 60 to 40 at his business. His plate has remained full as in the last six years he started doing the maintenance at Magnolia Gardens.

But regardless of how much he works, Boyce & Sons will continue doing what they have been doing for the last 50 years.

"It's been a journey but it's been a lot of neat customers, lot of loyal customers," said Rick.

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