



EXPLORE THE RIVERBEND: Bud Schwegel's memory lives on

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Alton business remains ‘mom and pop’ through his children

There are only a handful of so-called “mom and pop” businesses in the Alton area, but one going strong is Schwegel’s Market.

Mike Schwegel and his sister, Monica Campbell, now guide the business, taking over for their father, Bud. Bud, who died a couple years back, remains an Alton icon.

Many of the practices Bud established have continued, especially that personal, friendly service. Monica even delivers groceries to a set amount of people on Thursdays who have been grandfathered into their business.

Mike and Monica’s grandparents, Pete and Louise Schwegel, started the store that eventually became Schwegel's in Alton in 1936. Eventually, Bud and his brother, Ed, ran the business when their grandfather died. In October 1985, the store opened a location in Downtown Alton. Bud bought Ed’s rights of ownership in 2002 and continued to run the business until he died in May 23, 2013.

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Monica started with the store when she was 16, 20 years ago. She worked at both the Upper Alton location and the one in downtown when she started.

Monica said the business still has a true “mom and pop feel.”

Three of the checkers for Schwegel’s have a combined 89-plus years worth of experience at the family store. Theresa Maple and Jackie Yarbrough have been there 35-plus years and Bobbie Gernigan has been there 19 years.

“It is a neat neighborhood store,” said Monica, who is nicknamed “Baby” by the family. She is indeed the baby girl of her mom and dad’s children and the name stuck with family and friends. “We know everyone in the neighborhood.”



Before Bud died, he asked both Mike and Monica to continue the store as long as they could. He knew how much it meant to the neighborhood and Alton overall.

Bud practically lived at the store. He sat in an area in front and almost everyone who came in conversed with him.

“When people came in the door, they immediately looked up at him,” she said. “People loved him. When we had the wake for him, it was hours long. Everybody had a different story about dad. Some would say how he allowed them credit when they couldn’t afford it and how he gambled on whether they would come through on their debt or not. He would do anything and everything for everyone else.”

Bud and Eddie Sholar Sr., who started Fast Eddie’s, were best of friends. Monica and Mike remain close to Eddie and his family. Before Bud died, Eddie Sholar Sr. purchased a new motorcycle for him to ride. That was how close the two were to one another.

In the beginning of Fast Eddie’s, Schwegel’s provided the meat, but at some point, they outgrew what the hometown market could do.

Monica said her dad never changed and he would always give to others without question.

Today, Monica and Mike share the duties to manage the business.

She said she loves her brother and spending time each day with him in the business. Through all the years, she said the two have barely had an argument they get along so well.

“I spend more time with Mike sometimes than my husband,” she said. “We work 45 hours a week or more here.”

Schwegel’s has 15-20 employees. Mike recently made a change to add a coffee and soda fountain and he said it has been exceptionally popular.

“It is really convenient for the neighborhood,” he said of the fountain drinks area.



Meat has always been a staple for the shop.

“We have cheaper prices for meat for sure and we cut the meat to order,” Monica said.

Several times a week, Mike and Monica make sure they have fresh produce brought in, another staple of the store.

Schwegel’s operates seven days a week, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

Mike Schwegel said he enjoys the work and couldn’t imagine doing anything else for a living.

Mike has worked at the store since he was 14 years old. In college, Mike studied engineering and Monica has a biology degree, but both gravitated back to the store.

One of Mike’s skills is that he can fix nearly anything, which constantly saves the business money.

Monica said Thursday is now her favorite day of the week when she delivers groceries to people and gets to visit with customers.

Mike Schwegel said the one thing he will always think about his father, is if more people in the world like him, it will be a beautiful place.

“He always smiled every time and he knew everyone,” Mike said of his father. “My dad was our best worker. I miss him a lot.”

