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Standing the Test of Time

Haddad's Market

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by Amy Kennard

In an age in which even the largest chain stores are declaring bankruptcy, a small, local grocery store has successfully, yet quietly served its customers for more than 90 years.

In 1915, Joseph Haddad left his home in Lebanon to come to America to pursue a dream. Settling in Peoria, he married Mary Siyman, and together they saved enough money to open their first grocery store—Haddad's Market—on South Adams Street in 1919. Six years later, he moved the store to the front part of his home on the corner of First and Shipman streets.

Joe and Mary had two children: Fred, born in 1915, and Frieda, born in 1918. In 1937, Fred joined his father in the grocery business at the corner of Nebraska and Central streets. Joseph died in 1940, leaving Fred to carry on the family name.

In 1950, Fred tripled the size of the business and relocated to a 2,400-square-foot, full-service market on Wisconsin Avenue. Fred and his wife, Mary, had five children, the oldest being Fred Jr., who joined his father in the family business in 1963. Fred Jr. continued his father's and grandfather's success by opening a second store in West Peoria on the corner of Rohmann and Sterling, where he served his faithful customers for more than 40 years.

"We catered to the neighborhood as best we could," said Fred Jr. "There was a Jewel grocery store that opened up right down the street from us, and they gave us a year to stay in business. A year and a half later, they went out of business. We took care of our West Peoria customers, and West Peoria took care of us."

Catering to the Customers

In 1977, Fred Sr. sold the store on Wisconsin and joined forces with his son at the Rohmann location. After more than 17 years of success, Haddad's once again demanded expansion, and they relocated in 1982 to a 12,000-square-foot building on the same street—the market's current location. From its humble beginnings, the market now employed 32 full- and part-time workers, and between 1981 and 1994 averaged gross sales of over \$3 million per year.

In 1988, computerized scanners were installed in the three checkout lanes. To remain competitive with the bigger chain stores in the area, Fred Jr. added a deli and offered what remains one of the most popular offerings—entrees in microwavable containers. In 1991, he added a bakery, employing bakers who worked from 3am to 9am five days a week.

Fred admitted to having some worry when Wal-Mart moved into the area, but said specializing and catering to customers kept Haddad's alive and well. "Because of the older population, we would sell smaller portions of things—half pounds of ground beef, for example—for those who were only cooking for one or two." He tells a story of a man coming into the produce section and requesting a half head of lettuce. "Our produce manager cut it in half for him and wrapped the other half and put it out on the shelf. The next day, it was gone. So we started selling half heads of lettuce—it was our way of taking care of the needs of our customers."

In the late 1980s, Fred Jr. hired Garret Wrhel as the store's manager, unaware of the new legacy he was creating.

History Repeats Itself

Like Fred Haddad and his son, Garret Wrhel had been in



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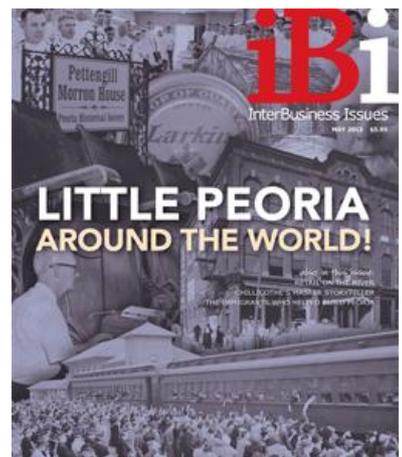
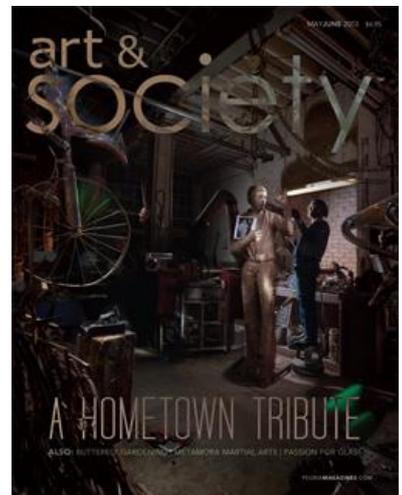
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the grocery business all his life. At 15, he took a job at the A & P in Pekin. After his marriage to Beverly, they moved to Colorado where Garret worked for Safeway, Inc., a national grocery store chain.



After some economic hardships in the 1980s, the Wrhels returned to Pekin, and Garret searched for a new opportunity. By chance, he stopped in Haddad's Market and introduced himself to Fred Jr. Soon after, he became the new store manager.

In 1995, Fred Jr, knowing there would not be another generation of Haddads to run the store, approached Garret about buying the business. In 1996, he officially sold Haddad's to Garret, with the promise that he would continue the tradition of a quality, family-owned, local market—still under the Haddad name.

Garret lived up to that promise. His wife, Beverly, worked in the meat department, and son Mark was hired on as a stocker and night manager. Fred Jr. was a friendly fixture at the market until 2004, helping the Wrhels learn the traditions and strategies of a lifetime labor of love.

Keeping the Legacy Alive

In 2000, the Wrhels expanded the grocery department to offer more specialty items. One of the most successful ideas came to fruition in 2002, when Mark, noticing the number of senior citizens in the neighborhood, introduced the idea of a home delivery service. Orders are taken Monday through Wednesday, and groceries are delivered Tuesday through Thursday. To place an order, all customers need do is call the home delivery line, and for a minimum of \$30 in groceries, their order will be filled by a personal shopper and delivered by a small staff of friendly, caring individuals who come to know their customers on a personal basis. "This was and still is a huge need in our community—and the fastest growing department in our store," notes Mark.

By 2006, the Wrhels had settled in to their ownership and were ready to make their own changes. Garret and Beverly were ready to move toward retirement and entrusted the business to son Mark. Says Mark, "It was good for me to start at the very bottom. I learned the entire business from the ground up, as well as the ins and outs of every job in the store." He continues, "My plan for the future of Haddad's was to begin the shift from the 20th to the 21st century. I needed to start updating departments, resetting the product selection and increasing the assortment of new and specialty items." Mark continued his dedication to the business and foresight to its success by completely remodeling and doubling the size of the meat and produce departments, resurfacing the parking lot and creating a new walkway leading to the store's entrance.

Giving Back

Haddad's Market has never been one to sit on its laurels. They are appreciative of their success, knowing that without the support of the community, it would not be possible.

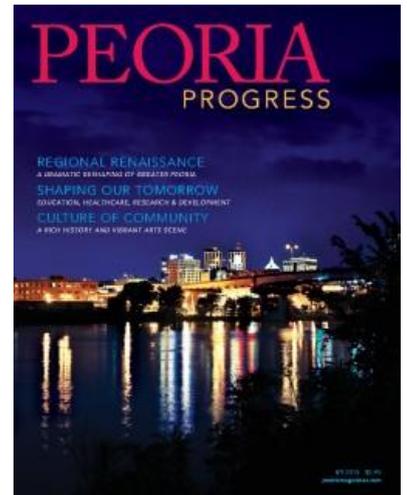
Fred remembers back in the late '60s when the West Peoria Fire Department was in dire need of a rescue vehicle. "We decided to donate one percent of our sales for a month to them, and as a result, they were able to buy the vehicle they needed." And when the local church had their annual pancake breakfast, Haddad's was there, donating the ingredients. "My only request was that they put up a sign to let people know that it came from Haddad's," laughed Fred Jr.

Just like his predecessors, Mark and his wife Erika believe that you get what you give. "We're active in the West Peoria Economic Development Commission and the West Peoria/Uplands Residents Association, to help grow and maintain businesses and neighborhoods in West Peoria. We also participate in the West Peoria Neighborhood Watch program and the Peoria Journal Star Newspaper in Education program." In addition, Mark is the past vice president of the West Peoria Lions Club, and chairman of the West Peoria 4th of July Parade/West Peoria Jamboree. They also support many local schools, including Manual, Calvin Coolidge, Whittier, Roosevelt, Notre Dame and St. Mark's with their fundraising and other events.

The Future of Haddad's

Mark Wrhel sees nothing but a bright future for Haddad's Market, and continues to upgrade the store while maintaining a friendly, local atmosphere. He plans to finish yet another remodel for the deli department, and a bakery and dairy department upgrade is slated for next year. And long-term? "My five-year plan is to expand Haddad's to a possible second location, possibly in North Peoria, but I'm still looking for that perfect spot."

According to Mark, Fred Haddad Sr.'s motto was "Never overextend yourself, and never owe people money." He echoes that sentiment, and adds his own simple secret: "A small, clean, friendly store with lots of community support." Today, Haddad's mission statement is the same as it was more than 90 years ago: "To provide our customers with a shopping experience that will exceed their expectations, encourage them to return, and tell their friends. This enables us to get a fair return on our investment and build a secure future for all our employees." **iBi**



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Comments

I LOVE Haddad's Market

Submitted by [Billy Dennis](#) on September 4, 2010 - 1:32pm.

I will drive past other stores to visit Haddad's. They have a decent selection in their deli, good fresh meat and the friendliest, most helpful employees that can be found at ANY Peoria market.

And I would shop there even if it wasn't a locally owned business, which means every dollar I spend there helps the local economy in ways that spending at corporate chain stores does not.

Shopping at Haddad's Market is double win for the Peoria area.

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