

# ALAMANCE

## Living

### MODEL BUSINESS PLAN:

FROM LUXURY BRANDS TO  
BRATWURSTS

### TEACHING BY EXAMPLE:

MENTORING A WAY OF LIFE FOR  
SANG HO LEE

## EDITOR'S NOTE

# THE STORE

THIS PLACE & THE PEOPLE HERE SHAPED THIS WRITER'S LIFE



Submitted photo

By Charity Apple

**T**he store — that's how those of us in the northeast corner of Guilford County referred to Murray Brothers Service Station in Gibsonville.

A few miles across the Guilford County line, customers came to the general store/service station for potted meat, Vienna sausages, sardines, sandwich bread, ice



cream, candy, chewing gum and soft drinks (in the bottles).

You could also fill up your gas tank, get your oil changed and your tires rotated.

Open every day, but Sunday, it was the place where you would pull up a wooden ale crate, sit on the front porch and learn the latest news in the community.

The gravel parking lot was filled with pickup trucks, some with gun racks on the back and others with

bales of straw in the bed. Then there were the occasional dogs, kids and sometimes, wives, would gather there as well.

At times, a concert would break out as musicians would bring their guitars and harmonicas and play.

Stepping through those doors was like going back in time with the wooden ceilings and floors, wood stove and window fan. There was no central heating and air back then. A window air conditioner was installed later, but rarely used.

The store was where men, of all ages, gathered to swap stories. The rotary dial phone would often ring with wives calling their husbands to come home for supper.

My own father was one of those men who got called from time to time.

Owners Howard Murray and his brother, R.C. "Dee" Murray, weren't just the ones who serviced your car or sold you grocery items, they asked about your family. They were sincere. They weren't blood, but they were family.

I can't remember a time that Howard, Dee and his wife, Irene,

weren't in my life. Irene was my grandmother's best friend.

They comforted me following the death of my beloved grandparents; and celebrated with me on the day I got married and on the days my sons were born.

The store was a second home.

For many, it was a therapy session, of sorts. It was where you went to talk about your lives and learn more about the community.

It was here that I really learned to listen. Thinking back, it was probably those moments that shaped me as a journalist although at the time, I didn't realize it.

The store has been closed for three years now, but I can't help but take a second glance — thinking of that young, blonde-haired, green-eyed girl (that I used to be) sitting alongside farmers, teachers, doctors and area businessmen, talking about things that really mattered.

This place, and these people, shaped me into who I am today and I'm grateful for their guidance, love and the laughter.



# Community Headquarters

The metal-clad Murray Brothers Service Station as seen by motorists along Osceola-Ossipee Road from Alamance County into Guilford County. [ROBERT THOMASON / TIMES-NEWS]

## MEMORIES OF A PLACE THAT TOUCHED GENERATIONS

By Charity Apple

GIBSONVILLE — Murray Brothers Service Station served as “the community headquarters.”

“It was the social center of the whole community,” said Billy Reid Apple, a former resident of the community in northeast Guilford County, who now lives in Milwaukee, Wis. “It was our bank, our grocery store and in some ways, our church.”

Built in 1948 as a country store, gas pumps and services such as oil changes and tire repair were added later.

Brothers R.C. “Dee” and Howard

Murray owned the store and they kept a large pad with the types of services as well as those who owed the charges.

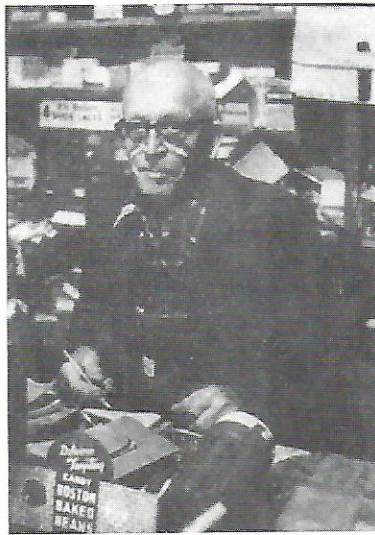
“Many of their customers were farmers. Nobody had any money until the crops would come in,” Apple said. “They would run a tab and they never charged interest.”

That pad still exists.

Rick Murray, Dee’s son, kept it.

“Those who would pay, would have a line through their names,” Rick Murray said. “And there were some that didn’t pay, but Daddy and Uncle Howard would never talk about it.”

The “store,” as folks in the



Above, Murray Store, 1982.

Left, Howard Murray waits on a customer.

[TIMES-NEWS FILE PHOTOS]

community called it, had potted meat, light bread (sandwich bread), candy, ice cream and plenty of soft drinks in bottles and in later years, in cans. Sardines, in a can, were sold a lot, too, and there was a bottle of Texas Pete and vinegar with a whole box of saltine crackers nearby to accompany the sardines.

Nabs (the yellow peanut butter crackers) and a drink were the most popular items sold there, Murray said.

“You could count on folks coming twice during the day for a Nabs and a drink break,” he said. “They’d come at 9:15 a.m. and then a lot of them would come again at 3:15 p.m.”

Murray Brothers was out in

the country and for most people, “going to town” meant driving at least 30 minutes. The store provided a service to the rural residents.

“We never bought any groceries anywhere, really. If we did buy something, though, it was at Howard and Dee’s. And oftentimes, the farmers would trade produce and other items for flour or salt or pepper. It was our food bank before there were food banks,” Apple said.

The Murrays had a garden out back and grew tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and other vegetables that they would give to people in the community.

“They were very giving people,” Murray said.

The topics of discussions that could be heard there often included the people in the community.

“They’d talk about who was sick or who was in the hospital or who needed help,” Murray said. “A prayer list was put together and Mama and Daddy and Howard would pray for those who needed assistance.”

A jar was put on the counter to collect funds for those who needed it.

“They would take up money to buy flowers for funerals, for instance,” Apple said.

It was the rural equivalent of a recreation center.

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Above, shelves show years of use in the Murray Brothers Service Station. Below, Stop Leak for car radiators is on display. [PHOTOS BY ROBERT THOMASON / TIMES-NEWS]

## COMMUNITY From Page 11

Catherine Jobe, of Elon, recalls playing hide-and-seek, jack rocks, Bingo and tic-tac-toe with her friend, Linda Bailey.

"We always went with my parents because they liked to go also. We stayed as late as 10 o'clock at night sometimes," she said. "That was really the only time we had kids our age to play with, other than at church."

"There was a ping-pong table at one time and a place to play horseshoes," Murray said. "They would leave the lights on and go home, telling whoever was still there to 'lock up before you leave.'"

Apple said that he can remember, as a teenager, being there late — sometimes until 3 a.m.

Dee and his wife, Irene, along with Howard, lived in the house next door.

"Howard would leave after the news was off at 11 o'clock," Murray said.

Apple said Murray Bros. had the first TV in the neighborhood.

"It got two channels. I know that sounds crazy nowadays, but we would watch 'Howdy Doody' and 'Buffalo Bill.' At 10 o'clock at night, the stations would go off and they'd play the national anthem."

Area residents donated furniture so folks would have somewhere, other than ale crates, to sit.

"Mom and dad gave a couple of chairs," Apple said. "And I believe they gave an English-style sofa with legs on it."

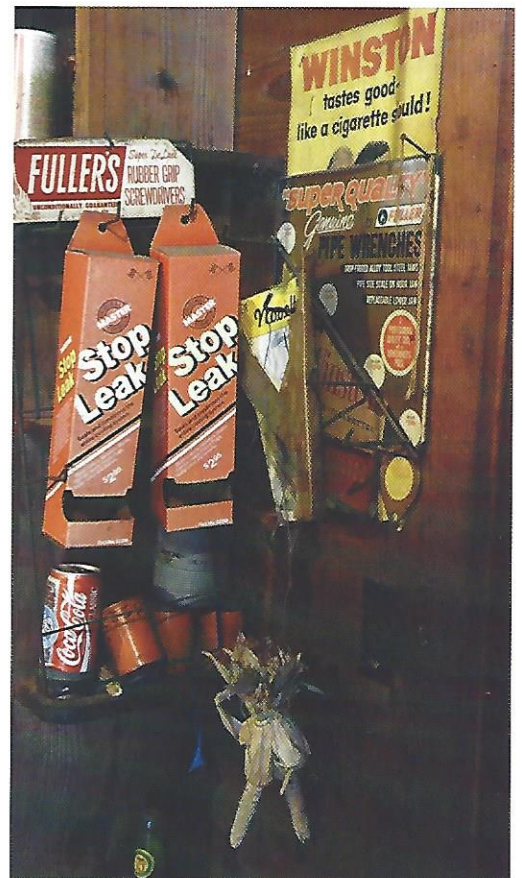
The wood stove was used to warm customers during the winter.

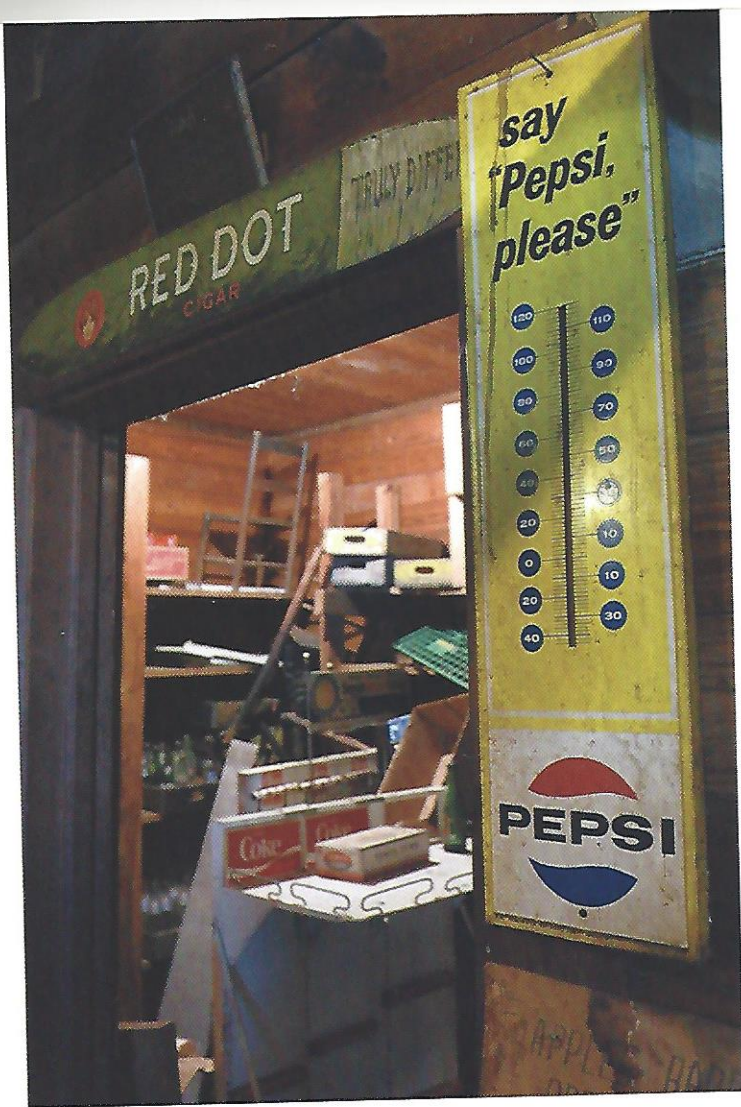
And, it served as a place to "roast" peanuts.

"There are still parched peanuts on the top of it, see?" Murray asked during a recent visit to the store.

Rick and his older brother, Dean, now deceased, grew up working and socializing at the store.

"I got an education at the store





**A Pepsi thermometer hangs beside the entrance to the stockroom.**

before I ever went to school," he said. "I enjoyed spending time there."

Howard died in March of 2001.

The store closed to the public in March, 2016, following Irene's death.

"Daddy never went back down there afterward," Murray said.

Dee died in May of 2016.

Although the building is still there, along with the sign, the contents inside were auctioned off last month. Now, all that remains is the memories.

"Several people had mentioned that we should reopen it, but in this fast-paced world, we just couldn't see doing it," Murray said. "Plus, it needs a lot of work to be up to code and there's no septic system. It never had a bathroom."

It's bittersweet for Murray, who spent most of his life there.

"Five generations of people came through that store," Murray said. "I can remember Daddy giving Double Bubble chewing gum and quarters and dollars to kids who later grew up and went on to bring their kids and then their grandkids."

"My fondest memories are of people coming together — people from all walks of life — it was a wonderful place to be," he added.

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