

## Arts & Entertainment

# Havelock merchant converts store into 'museum'

By Carl Sjulín

Retail merchant Russell Dodworth decided to do something about his dying store, the Dodworth and Sons Farm Store, 6132 Havelock Ave.

What Dodworth has done to revive his business, however, is something unique. The crux of Dodworth's problem (as well as other Havelock retailers) is deep-rooted in the economy and within people themselves.

"With the present national economic situation in its dire state, coupled with the fact Havelock Avenue got ripped up and 'beautified' with one tempting and expensive federal block grant from mid-summer until just before Christmas, the retail community is dying in Havelock," Dodworth said.

Dodworth said retail stores in Havelock suffer because buyers purposely avoid their stores because upon entering, they feel obligated to buy something.

"When you go into K-Mart or Richman Gordman, you don't feel bad if you don't buy anything. However, when you go into small stores like mine where the sales clerk is probably the owner, you feel obligated to buy something — anything — instead of muttering a nervous 'thank you' or 'I'm just looking' and leaving empty-handed."

Dodworth's cure to these ailments was to convert the Dodworth and Sons Farm Store into a "retail museum," a move he thinks will make customers feel more welcome.

"Why not turn it into a museum so people will not feel obligated to buy," Dodworth said. "Being a museum, there is nobody to look at you resentfully if you don't buy anything."

Overnight, Dodworth has transformed his store into a retail museum in honor of the bygone days of buying and selling by appointing himself curator and putting a large chrome turnstyle at the head of the store. Tickets have been printed up (a life membership costs \$1 — the store's life, not yours) and Dodworth says buses are welcome.

"Within 24 hours, I changed from a common store-keeper to a curator. I've had no increase in salary, but I feel I've come up the social ladder."

So what has Dodworth done besides launch such a bizarre media blitz?

"We've made the retail museum into a welcome break from the uniformly lighted, brightly colored, Muzaked-to-death, huge shopping centers. On the other side of our chrome-plated turnstyle is an unusual collection of new merchandise set about at random with a sort of garbage sale informality."

The phrase "unusual merchandise" might represent the understatement of Dodworth's entire campaign to draw attention to the retailer's plight. The retail museum features an emporium of goods and souvenirs ranging from Frisbees that fly with electric lights to original art works with clothing and fishing tackle in between. A host of modern glassware referred to as "depression glass" in honor of the depression of 1982 is also present. Perhaps the most unique facet of Dodworth's business is the fact he buys almost all of his products through trade.

"Every few weeks I will travel down to Dallas or Oklahoma City to the Trade Exchange. There I will trade items for ones that I want in my store or just get rid of items that wouldn't sell. Last year I traded \$24,000 of watches for various items I now carry in my store. I also used the watches to trade for my air fare and lodging once I arrived."

Dodworth, who attended graduate school at New York University's film and acting division, said many of the items he acquires are sell-outs of businesses and he can acquire these products very cheaply and pass the savings along to his customers.

"The customers who come into my store and pay cash receive a 50 percent discount and are in effect getting a wholesale price. People are welcome to come in and make a trade offer for something as well. All the prices are marked in equivalent trade units: for example, a farmer came in last spring with 9,000 feet of chimney pipe and we traded for an upright piano. We might take in 65,000 feet of four conductor wire and trade for a video recorder which in turn might be used for a radio spot."

Dodworth currently has more than 500 microphoned headsets he acquired in a trade with a bankrupt audio store. He plans to take these to Dallas to trade for two semi-loads of grass seed and fertilizer for the coming spring season. It is examples such as these that comprise the bulk of the retail museum's business.

"On an average day we take in about \$10 to \$15 of cash. I've sent my new marketing strategy to *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, as well as all the local TV stations and I hope this encourages people to come into the store. I've also propped up a few life-size dolls in the front window to make things look more busy. You can tell I'm hard up for people — right now I'm as lonely as the Maytag repairman."

For those who are interested in experiencing the retail museum, Dodworth has published a list of museum rules that he feels will help keep the throngs of visitors organized. They are: 1) Please be considerate of other visitors to the museum. If you are admiring a particular object, please contain your enthusiasm. 2) Photographs are allowable. See curator because he often likes to get in the frame and point proudly at things. 3) Interpreters — Foreign Language. Basic Havelock dialect is spoken. 4) Lost and Found. All lost items not reclaimed within a short amount of time will be put on sale for the benefit of the museum. 5) Tips on what to see. Don't rush through or crowd and push others. If you think somebody is hogging a particular exhibit, just politely ignore your feelings of annoyance and come back to this exhibit later. 6) You are visiting the only museum in the United States of America that pays taxes, just like you do, or should. 7) The museum is reverently dedicated to the free enterprise system. None of the sales at the souvenir shop are tax-deductible, nor is membership.

"We would like to profit by your visit here. If not, we'll still be friends. The retail species is a lonely and forgotten group, so we have a great capacity for friendliness," Dodworth said.



Photo by Dave Bentz

Dodworth & Sons Farm Store/Retail Museum, 6132 Havelock Ave.

## FOR RENT: Columnist reveals the cold truths

**FOR RENT:** Converted garage. Walk-out living room. Push button door. Home away from home for car parts person. Off-street parking. Close to bus route and garbage.

"Hello, I'm calling about the apartment you have for rent."

"Yes, I'll need to ask you a few questions."

"That's fine."

"Do you work at Safeway?"

"No."

"Gateway Realty?"

"Huh?"



**T. Marni Vos**

"The Boar's Head . . . did you work at the Boar's Head?"

"No."

"Are you employed?"

"Yes . . . I sell vans and Winnebagos."

Click.

**FOR RENT:** One bedroom apartment. \$35.00 a month plus utilities — gas heat — can provide sweaters, sleeping bags and vitamin C . . . am willing to negotiate.

**FOR RENT:** Back to Nature Apartment. Unique. Have to see to believe. \$75.00 a month. Call.

"Hello, I'm calling about your apartment . . . I work for the unemployment office downtown."

"Oh, I think you'll really like it. Anne sure did."

"Anne?"

"Older woman . . . she died down there."

"Down there?"

"It's a basement apartment."

"Oh, I see . . . why do you call it back to nature?"

"Well, it's got a dirt floor. It'll be a long time before you see another one like this . . . real black soil, high in nitrogen and hydrogen — sand base — real nice."

"You're renting out an apartment with a dirt floor?"

"Do you have a cat? Cats love it down there."

"Oh Lord, I'm sorry, I have to go."

"You can have a garden in the kitchen. Fresh vegetables every day. Do you like fishing? I have a boat to buy another night crawler. Paste a few worms on it and it's like you're camping every . . ."

Click.

**FOR RENT:** Beautiful old-fashioned house. One room. Prefer single person, no family or relatives. Call or stop in. Ask for Abbey or Martha.

Tea is served at 3.

**Needed Female Roommate:**  
Call Merrill evenings and weekends.

**Needed Female Roommate:**  
Share utilities and clothes. Wear size 12-13 . . . am seldom home nights.

"Hello I'm calling about your ad in the paper."  
"Yea, right."  
"You need a roommate?"

"What I really need is someone to help me kill these cockroaches. I have done everything . . . I've set up hotels, roach bombs, I got that "lady no more cockroach" shelf paper and the dumb things walk on it while I'm putting it down. I'm grocery shopping for 56 — you know what I mean?"

Click.  
"Hello."

"Hello Mom, this is Marni . . . I'd like to move back home."

"Well, that's fine but everybody helps with the chores. Midnight is late enough for a young lady to be out prowling around, your father and I have always . . ."

Click.