

Baseball was once big in Willard

The Willard baseball team of 1956: (front from left) Ernie Arch, Chuck Vesel, Billy Jordan, Ed Trunkel (manager), (middle) Eugene Janezich, Ralph Landini, Jim Zallar, Bill Rodgers, Sylvester Champa, Tim Martens, (back) Al Volovsek, Willie Volovsek, Charlie Klapatauskas, Roger Kirn, Jim Reineke and John Gregorich.



Store, from page 4

And the Sudas had to oblige, not just with friendships to their patrons, but competitive services and prices. After all, in Willard's boom days, there were three stores in town and each had their clientele.

"The fact that we had competitors across the street, we had to keep our nose to the grindstone to make sure our prices were low enough to keep our customers," Avis said. "We all made money. It's hard to believe now when you look at the town. It was a booming business. It's just unbelievable to think that it used to be such a flourishing town, to think that all three stores were flourishing. We all were doing well."

Families even did their Christmas shopping in Willard, Avis remembers, and bought wedding gifts in town. When it was time for the kids to go back to school, Suda's Store was ready with all the supplies. Yet even though the store was such a full-service outlet for so many families, Avis said they almost always got paid.

"We carried a lot of money on the books, but the people were so trustworthy in those days," she said. "You might have to wait, but you knew you'd get your money. I'd say 95 percent of the people were dedicated. They were just honest, hard-working people that we dealt with."

During hard times in the 1930s and 1940s, area farmers grew beans and sold them to the canning factory. Many of them asked for credit until they could get paid for their crop.

"A lot of people said, 'When I get my bean check, I'll pay my bill,'" Avis said. "Most of them did it."

In the World War II years, the family business had to deal with rationing of everything from sugar to coffee. Avis recalls one time when the store had a surplus of a hot commodity.

"I can remember people coming from Greenwood saying, 'I heard you

have soap,'" she said.

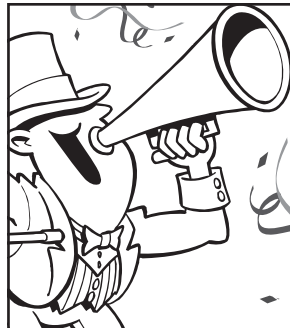
As the years passed, it was normal for the Sudas to run their business all day and take care of bookwork at night. However, she said, there was the satisfaction of supplying a growing town.

"We just took it in our stride," Avis said of the work. "I was contented. It's just what we did. In most of those years, we just really enjoyed it."

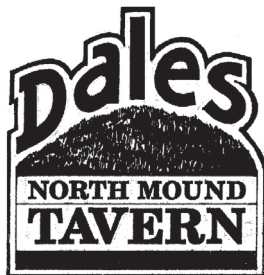
Avis and Stanley sold out to Brian

Harder in 1984, eight years after the store across the street shut its doors.

In the years that followed, the Sudas watched as activity on Willard's Main Street slowed, and eventually, their old business was closed, too. Now Willard has little left to bring in people, two garages, two taverns, the church. It's a far cry from 20 years ago, Avis said, or 40 years ago, or even 60 years ago, when Willard was alive and thriving.

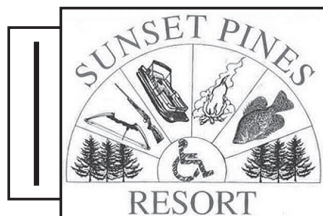


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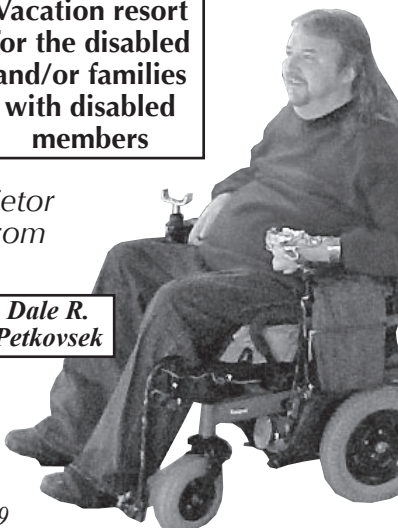
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