

From the Mayor...

April 5, 2019

The sudden closure of Owens Supermarket last month created a void that nobody wanted. The grocery business has always served our Warsaw downtown neighbors and work force well for many decades.

The City is working hard to make sure that void is only temporary. We are actively pursuing the Kroger Central Division Office in Indianapolis to allow disposition of the real estate to include a grocery partner. That is step one. In the meantime, we are also soliciting interest from other grocery partners to help develop the site to include downtown retail grocery as part of a stand-alone or collaborative plan.

Kroger officials have told me that the store was losing money since 2006. Understand that as a corporate entity, unlike the locally owned stores that served our community so well for many years, Kroger is keeping their eye on the big picture. Just last month, Kroger stock fell 5% on the news that Amazon announced plans to enter the grocery business. You remember Amazon purchased Whole Foods in 2017. We have all seen retail change dramatically in the last ten years. Competition is fierce.

Many small grocery stores and supermarkets have dotted the map in and around our community.

The Dutch Grocery Store at 206 South Buffalo and Hankins Grocery at 411 West Market Street were a couple of the earliest. Kroger opened in 1929 at 109 South Buffalo Street, then moved in 1942 to 114 West Main, and later in the 1960's to 1801 East Center Street.

There was also an "A&P", Hoffers Supermarket, and Ditto's all on South Buffalo Street. "A&P" later moved out to the Lakes Villages Shopping Center.

Woodies operated on North Lake Street from 1969 to the early 1990's.

In 1939, Chief Supermarket, the first "supermarket" in Warsaw, was opened on North Lake Street. It moved to 540 East Market in 1952 and was purchased by Marsh Supermarkets in 1956. Marsh then moved to the 400 block of South Buffalo in 1993. They served our community until 2017 when a struggling Marsh corporate closed many of their Indiana store locations.

Mr. Owen Emerick started as a meat cutter at the Jet White Grocery Store at 111 South Buffalo Street. He and his partner purchased the Jet White. In 1938, they bought the Robinsons Markets located at 114 East Market and 112 North Buffalo. In 1959, he built Owens Supermarket at 302 West Market Street. Mr. Emericks' son-in-law, Joe Prout, worked alongside his father for many years. He expanded the family business to a second location at 2211 East Center Street in 1978. In 1994, the store was then moved next door to its current location on East Center Street.

Locally owned grocery stores vanished in Warsaw when Kroger purchased Owens Supermarkets in 1998.

(My apologies if some of the details aren't exactly correct. I may have also inadvertently omitted other downtown locations, but I will give credit to [A History of the City of Warsaw, Indiana](#) by Michelle Bormet and [Kosciusko County: An Oral and Pictorial History](#) authored by Dan Coplen, for their assistance.)

The purpose of this brief history lesson is to point out the retail grocery establishments that have been a historical part of our downtown. When the Market Street Owens closed last month, we were left without a downtown grocery store.

Mr. Emerick and his family operated a local grocery business that stressed customer service and met the local needs of our community for decades. I'll bet as he was trimming pork chops in the back room at the Jet White, he never dreamed the grocery business would need to become so complex!