

Healthy Profile: *Community Connection*

Corner Store in Toronto, Ontario, Canada South Riverdale Neighbourhood

(46.9 % low-income individuals, 2006 census)

Interview by local resident Cathy Keenan

I spoke briefly to our neighbourhood convenience store that has been here for a long time (more than 20 years). They are a convenience store that sells flowers, produce, milk and dairy and a whole bunch of stuff. You really can do your grocery shopping there. I think they probably had a slow build to being able to sell so much stuff.

The wife of the person who owns it spoke with me and she wasn't sure about the licensing etc. for the produce. However they go directly to the Ontario Food Terminal to pick up the food so they don't pay for delivery charges. I think you need a license to belong to the terminal, though, and not sure how much that is. She didn't think there was a minimum of spending at the food terminal. They could get whatever they felt they needed.

Anyway as far as business goes they are very interested in being part of the neighbourhood community. I know they hire young kids and sometimes people a little down on their luck to help clean the store, inventory etc....

In the summer they do display food and flowers outside and some stuff does go missing, but that is a risk she says you take. Because they are so enmeshed in the community they have many long time loyal customers who report to them when they see people stealing.

The store owners know many of the patrons by their first name, and as I mentioned, have long time customers who will go out of their way to come to the store because of the relationships they have built. Even people who move out of the neighbourhood come back to say hi.

They advertise out front what they sell very cheaply to bring people in. ie) \$.50 pops (and cheap cigarettes). These have been effective at bringing people in the door and hopefully when they see the variety of what they sell they will purchase more stuff.

There was a low income housing development nearby and they wanted to start selling more foods (fruit, veggies, cereals, milk etc... and because many of these people don't have a car they could just walk over and do most of their shopping at their store. They keep their prices low. As a business model, again, this helps build customer loyalty.

They have cheap stuff for sale as well as premium organic top of the line stuff to appeal to the changing [*gentrifying*] neighbourhood and people of all economic levels.

I didn't have much time to ask more questions but they always have a flow of customers. In fact they are so busy they have 2 cash registers. It is a family owned business that's been around for a long time and they really are very community centered and as a business this pays off in customer loyalty.

As far as displaying their food out front, they only have 1 meter of space they can take up as the rest belongs to the city, I think you do need a license for a whole bunch of stuff (display signs, sell produce...not sure on the details for that and it might be different in the States.) In the summer they like to do nice flower displays (which they say customers compliment them on) and have fresh baskets of squash, apples, oranges...