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THE PROSPECT We All Love

Question ...

There is one place in our beloved Town of Prospect where everyone gets to meet everyone on a regular basis, and which is the real community center of town. Do you know where that is? Is it the Senior Center? No, that is age-restrictive. Could it be the Town Hall? No, not everyone goes there. How about one Church or the other? Again, only a portion of the town attends each one. So where is this dynamic meeting place, the hub of all activity in Prospect? The answer is Oliver's.

Yes, it is Oliver's and has been since George Oliver decided to move from his East Main Street location in Waterbury and build a little store in the growing Town of Prospect, back in the late 40's. He began with a small venture which incorporated his store into one-half of a building which he shared with Al Cinq-Mars, who had his Handy Kitchen Bakery in the other half.

George, wife Mary, and his son and daughter took up residence in a tiny house which was located about where the Lions Club clock now stands near the junction of Scott Road and Rt. 69. Mr. Oliver was a hard-working man, a no-nonsense employer, who expected his employees to show up neatly dressed with shirt and tie and to give him full measure for payment received. His employees, and there were few in number in the early days, were a loyal bunch who stayed with him for long periods. He delivered some orders from his station wagon and used it to pick up items from the wholesalers, too. In the late afternoons he also used it to transport his son and many other members of St. Anthony's CYO Baseball Team to and from games.

Fellows like Fran Woods and many other local lads got a substantial grounding in a proper work ethic from George. Early on he incorporated the idea of assisting the customer with their purchase by bagging the groceries and wheeling them out to the customers' cars.

George got to know everyone in town, sometimes by their first name. He constantly marched at a rapid pace about the store, keeping things in the crowded store on an even keel. Wife Mary melded quite well into Prospect's social and religious activities and was busy in both areas. The children both attended Sacred Heart High School, where they excelled in the academic field. George would have it no other way.

In time, in the 50's, Oliver's outgrew its location and George built a new and beautiful store

next door. He also built a house right next to the store for his family. About every family who had growing children in Prospect had someone who worked for George Oliver at one time or another. He was probably one of the major employers in town at that time.

If I have given you the impression that George was an old skinflint, I have erred seriously. In fact, he was quite the opposite, and charitable to a fault. Most of his beneficial deeds were accomplished without anyone knowing about it. My own son, Larry, tells me about the many times George would tell him to bring his car around to the front. He would hand Larry a dollar for gas and give him several bags of groceries to take to poor families in town. He cautioned Larry to tell no one about his charitable works.

On another occasion, one man in town who was an official in an organization, suffered some financial reverses and attempted to cover them up by appropriating a large sum of money from the organization's treasury. George, knowing the man's true character, lent the man money to pay back his debt. The man went to his grave appreciating the good deed George Oliver had done for him.

So it continued on through the years, with a pattern of steady growth resulting in another expansion of the store. His daughter married and soon son-in-law Norman Livermore was on the scene daily lending his assistance to the busy store. A young married lady moved into town in the early 50's and found that Oliver's was the place where mothers weighed their babies. Arlene Baker was her name and she discovered that Oliver's was the place where people met to discuss other things than groceries and that it was a hub of sorts for town activities.

When it came time for George and Mary to slow down their pace and retire, a worthy successor named Leond "Lenny" Noble, purchased the store, but decided to keep the name Oliver's atop the masthead. He wasn't in business very long at all when a devastating fire put the store out of business. In fact, it was such a bad fire that it caused the Prospect Fire Department to incorporate certain changes into its procedures for fighting fires in the future.

Undaunted, Lenny Noble decided to build again and build he did, and the results were a more spacious and efficient store than before. As soon as Lenny reopened, the loyal Prospect customers turned out to welcome

him back and back he is, to stay.

Lenny and family are fully involved in the daily workings of Prospect and contribute to worthy causes on a regular basis. People in Prospect are a loyal bunch and continue to patronize Oliver's on a regular basis, and in doing so, meet and greet friends with whom they share a pleasant word or two.

So, if you get ready to make your usual trip to Oliver's, plan on just a little extra time, because you never know who you are going to chat with. Oliver's is our own institution, and a great one at that.

Reminiscing About a Bus Driver

Who else remembers Mr. McElligott, the CR&L bus driver from the late 40's and early 50's? Arlene says she was newly married and a tenant of the upper floors of the Hotchkiss House during that period and a regular rider on the CR&L lines.

The kids who rode the CR&L bus to school during the 40's remember him by another name. He was appended the name of "The Judge" because of his dour appearance. Whoever he was, he had the continued operation of the Prospect bus in his heart. In those days, the bus would swing around onto Center Street and park for some time in front of the present location of Town Hall before starting its journey back to Waterbury. Arlene Baker says that he used to stop opposite the Hotchkiss House and sound the horn to get her attention. She also states that he used to become angry if any of his steady riders got a free ride to Waterbury. He would tell them that if more people didn't ride the bus, the CR&L would discontinue service to Prospect. Events would eventually prove him to be right.

Over the Back Fence

Chatted with "The Wild Colonial Boy" Jack Sullivan recently. After undergoing more than his share of health issues, Jack is threatening to resume his regular schedule, so everybody watch out! Also good to see that John and Marge Bell have been active once again. They had their problems, too, but are progressing nicely, thank you.

The Old Smoothy, Joe Thompson, is moving a little slowly these days. I see he keeps the old Blackthorn Walking Stick close to hand for walking or any other reason, so better be careful around him.

Some of the best news I saved for last. One of our Stars in the Firmament of Prospect for lo these many years has been that beautiful and gracious lady Helen Stanley. We saw her in Church last Sunday and I must say I never saw her looking better. She is a wonder and a delight to all who know her.

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