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Interview with Big Bear Grocery Store Manager, Mark Potter

Lurette Frost

Mark Potter

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Researchers name: Lurette Frost

Event: Interview with Big Bear Grocery Store Manager, Mark Potter

Place: Big Bear Grocery Store in Mt. Vernon Ohio

Co-workers Present: None

LF: Lurette Frost

MP: Mark Potter

LF: This is Lurette Frost interviewing Mark Potter at the Big Bear Grocery Store in Mt. Vernon Ohio on the 26th of October. Just a couple of questions, you can elaborate as much as you want on any of them. When and how did you get started in this Business?

MP: I started with Big Bear in 1973 on my summer break while I was in college. I intended it to just be a summer job

LF: Have you always worked at this location?

MP: No. I started in Zanesville and I have worked at probably 10 or 15 other locations.

LF: Why did you decide to go into this business? MP: Well, I took the job as a part time job and the pay was very good so I just stayed here. LF: As store manager, what does your job entail?

MP: I am responsible, basically for everything that goes on in the store, making sure that we are properly staffed and that we have the people here at the right times, responsible for ordering supplies, basically just everything we do here.

LF: So are you in charge of purchasing the goods for this store?

MP: Right, I don't do it directly, but it would be my responsibility.

LF: And how many people work in this store?

MP: About 80

LF: 80, and how is the work divided or how is it organized, different managers or

MP: By department and there will be a department manager for each department and of course they all answer to me.

LF: How do you choose what items to sell and the specific brands?

MP: Ok, that's all, those are all corporate decisions that are made at corporate headquarters.

LF: and is that the same as pricing and the quantities of things that you would bring into the store?

MP: No, I would determine quantities based on our sales but pricing would not be determined here. That would be a corporate decision too.

LF: And how do you determine the quantities, do you?

MP: You judge by your history, sometimes it's a guess, when you have an item on sale you may not know for sure how much you are going to sell. You look at the time of year and the price and make the best guess you can.

LF: Do you use a computer for that sort of stuff?

MP: No, it is pretty much guess work.

LF: Knowing your customers and

MP: Yep, that's right.

LF: How often do items change in this store? Do you know how the corporate headquarters make their decisions?

MP: They discontinue items and bring in new items as times go by and they basically look at the sales, the volume and make those decisions based on that and also the type of merchandise. Obviously there are few items that sell very slowly but you have to have as a customer service and we would never discontinue those.

Phone call but it went to the front desk

LF: So who are your customers?

MP We draw, pretty much all of Knox County. Our clientele is obviously everybody here in Mt. Vernon, Apple Valley, Fredricktown, Danville, Centerburg, pretty much the whole County.

LF: How often do you interact with the customers on a day to day basis?

MP: Well as the day goes by, off and on, all day long. I am on the sales floor most of the time.

LF: And why do you think your customers come to your store?

MP: I would like to think that they come here because we give friendly service, we are clean, we have a high quality of merchandise.....

LF: how would you say that your operation relates to like the smaller stores or the local markets, like the farmers market in town?

MP: Not sure I can give a good answer to that question. I think those operations are going to draw on their own regardless of probably of what we do. That is people who are looking for something that is locally grown and don't have a whole lot of items that are grown right here in Knox County.

LF: Do you have any items that are grown locally here?

MP: There may be a few, but again they are purchased at corporate level and we don't know where

LF: Where is the corporate headquarters?

MP: That is in Syracuse New York

LF: Is Big Bear all over the country?

MP: Big Bear is Ohio and West Virginia the rest of the chain is in Pennsylvania, New York and a couple of stores in Vermont.

LF: What do you think is the most important in the selection your customers make?

MP: What are they looking for? I think price and quality and that will vary from store to store, for this store I think those are equally as important.

LF: May be you won't know this but do know where most of your food comes from, If it was shipped in or

MP: Yes, It would all be shipped in. The produce they buy from all over the country and it will depend on the growing seasons and what's in season in what part of the country, but Florida, California.

LF: and the meat, do you know where the meat comes from?

MP: Again, that's purchased at corporate level and I wouldn't know where that comes from.

LF: So you said that some of our food could be locally grown how would you

MP: There is quite a few Ohio items, I am certain. Melons and Corn, I know we get a lot of stuff by down along the Ohio River.

LF: and again, you wouldn't make those decisions?

MP: No we don't make those decisions.

LF: So for your project we are actually ammm

MP: We do a but Ohio thing, every, I believe it is in August every year, and we highlight the items that are locally grown and so there will be little tags around the store that show what they are and there is quite a few items.

LF: So that's in August you said?

MP: Yep

LF: SO for your project we are studying the food production in Knox county and exploring the possibilities of building interest in purchasing local foods from Knox County to kind of keep money within Knox County. Have you ever considered the possibility of selling more locally grown foods, doing more Ohio, like you do in August?

MP: Again, that would be a corporate decision. We are allowed to buy a few things locally, there is some criteria that have to be met, pricing and that sort of thing, but we do very little of it.

LF: And would you be able to work with that or would that again be a corporate decision?

MP: My produce manager would probably make the decision, it is all produce items and like I say there is a list of guidelines they send out to him to determine whether he can do it or not.

LF: And are they pretty strict, like what amounts you need at what time and what amounts you get and pricing?

MP: Pricing is the big thing. We won't spend more for it locally then we can get it for at the warehouse.

LF: What to you see as benefits or liabilities of having more locally grown foods, both as a community member and a store manager?

MP: I think it is good to have locally grown items, it shows you support the community wherever you can.

LF: Is there any thing else you would like to say that I have not asked yet?

MP: No, I am not... Basically you are interested in local buying and we pretty well covered that.

LF: Is there any one else I could talk to, like the produce manager about the locally grown foods to just..?

MP: You would be free to do that, he is on vacation right now and will be back next week.

LF: OK

MP: He knows a little more about where the items are shipped from, then I do, because he works with them and he sees what it says on the crates.

LF: Cool

MP: He is really the only one. The meat items, I don't think you'll find any thing that is local. So pretty much it will all be produce.

LF: Do you know where the meat comes from?

MP: No I have no idea.

LF: If I have any other questions could I come talk to you again?

MP: Sure can

LF: Great

MP: As far as the meat is concerned, if we wanted to know where our particular meat comes from obviously it is stamped on the box, but it varies and I don't think there is very much local buying at all there. OK

LF: Ok, Thank you