

## Main St. merchants understood service

I am working on a memoir of my experiences growing up in a Minnesota small town in the 1950s.



**DENNIS M. CLAUSEN**

Some of those memories involve the Main Street merchants I remember from my youth. They were a colorful cast of characters.

One of my favorites was the owner of our local hardware store. Customers never bought anything from him without first being taught what to do with it. Like every good teacher, he spiked his instructions with a few humorous anecdotes and gentle commentaries on life. He seemed to enjoy that part of his job even more than the business of buying and selling. The other Main Street merchants I remember from my youth also tended to put a human (and humorous) face on their business activities.

→ I was reminded of those small-town merchants when I read the article, "Grangetto's planting seeds of knowledge," in the Feb. 3 edition of the North County Times. In the photograph, Kevin Grangetto, co-owner of Grangetto's Farm and Supply, is standing with arms raised high, smiling broadly.

Some of Grangetto's products are visible behind him. They are not antiseptically arranged in symmetrical rows. Rather, there is just a hint of comfortable clutter, as though someone decided to be neat, but not to be a slave to some master organizational plan created in a distant corporate office.

The photograph of Kevin Grangetto and the contents of his store could have come right out of the Main Street stores I remember from my youth.

According to Grangetto, "Having educated employees is essential for the company's success." The way Grangetto's employees achieve this knowledge is by attending "Grangetto's University, which is a multiple-week crash course into understanding the industry."

Ironically, I read the article on Grangetto's the day after I had tried to purchase a new printer from an employee in a chain store. The employee struggled to help me, although he admittedly knew nothing about the product.

When I spoke to the manager, he acknowledged that corporate policy did not adequately train employees to be teachers as well as sales personnel. Recently, I have had similar experiences in other corporate chain stores.

Stores like Grangetto's not only carry on an older tradition of the way small-town merchants did business. They also connect Escondido to its rural and agricultural past. The store is not located in a strip mall among high-density condominiums and office buildings. It's somewhat off the beaten path, and it has a real owner who talks to customers and gives a human face to the business.

Stores like Grangetto's are refreshing echoes from the past. When you bought something on America's Main Streets, you also bought the acquired knowledge and expertise of the merchant who sold you the product.

Folks my age have to be careful that we don't idealize our own place and time in history. Still, there is much to be said for the old Main Street merchants who combined teaching and a little humor with their business activities.

---

Escondido resident **Dennis M. Clausen** is a freelance columnist for the North County Times. Comment at [nctimes.com](http://nctimes.com).