

Edward Cantor, Three Generations of Customer Service and Still Growing
by
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Cantor's Quality Meats and Groceries has been in business for 72 years. It was started by Edward Cantor's grandparents to raise money during the depression. Times were tough for a lot of people and money was a scarce commodity. Edward's grandfather (Edward senior) began selling small items; buttons, zippers, thread, etc. to neighbouring farmers. Finally, they converted part of their home into a small, one aisle, grocery store and began selling meat and produce to their neighbours.

Those were the days of the barter system, where you could get many of the groceries you needed by trading good and services. Edward says, "My dad (Joseph) would pick up chickens and eggs and deliver them to the local people on his bicycle."

Over the years, Joseph and his brother Oscar worked in the store, each taking their turn running the business while the other brother served in the military during World War II. Oscar's service career was cut short when it was discovered that he had a heart murmur, so he worked at the store while Joseph was in the Navy.

As the store expanded, they built additional sections to the house to accommodate the growing demand. "They added on four times to the house," Edward says. "Finally, the house was not a house anymore. They made the upstairs into a relaxing room, where they could go up to have lunch, or rest, and it became a business only."

The store moved three times as it grew. Edward says, "The original store was on the corner of Dufferin and Salter, then it moved to Magnus Avenue, then they moved to Gallagher, where our parking lot is now."

"About six years ago, we needed more space," Edward says. "So they knocked down the old store and built this store."

Edward is proud of the reputation he inherited from his Father, Uncle and Grandparents. "It is a fixture in Winnipeg," he says. "We have a lot of loyal customers. Back in the day you helped out people in the area. People remember

that, and they have remained with us, from parents to their kids and their grandkids.”

Although Edward’s sisters and brother haven’t worked at the store since they were young: “Everyone of us started here as a kid,” Edward says. “If you wanted money, you have a part time job at the store.”

As the third generation to run Cantor’s Quality Meat and Groceries, Edward is proud to say that this has been the only place he has ever worked. “When I was 14 years old, I came here after school to work,” he says. “When I graduated, I stayed on here. I’ve been here for 39 years.”

Currently Edward and his wife, Heather, are the only family members working in the family business, although their children, like every generation before them, started out working in the store. Their daughter, Lexi, graduated from law school, and their son, Ryan, wants to go into medicine. “They want to take over the business and keep it going when I retire,” Edward says. “But they plan to hire somebody to run it for them.”

Like most businesses that have been around a long time, Cantor’s Meats and Groceries has evolved with the times. “We have a website and it does very well,” Edward says. “We have just started using Facebook and Twitter. That is the next generation, and if you don’t keep up, you will fall behind.”

But even though Cantor’s Meats and Groceries has kept up with technology, it has also maintained its old fashioned values. “We keep the quality of our meat high and cut to order,” Edward says. “We believe in customer service. The customer is the one who pays your bills, so they are always right, 100 percent of the time.”

The main sales feature has always been their meat. Cantor’s has always brought in full sides of beef and pork and done their own cutting and their customers have come to expect it. “We have a full line of groceries to offer our customers,” Edward says. “But the main thing is the meat.”

It is also important to Edward to shop local. “We get Bothwell Cheese, Winkler Ham and all our meat is Manitoba grown,” he says.

As the younger generation starts to become the new generation of customers, Edward adjusts his business to accommodate the new customers. For instance, you can order your groceries on Cantor’s website. “We are the only store in Winnipeg

that has an entire order system online,” he says. “The next piece to work on is Facebook and Twitter.”

Cantor’s still offers a delivery service, much like it did when the store first opened, but unlike the original store, purchases are not delivered by bicycle. Nor do you have to have delivery done through Canada Post, like many of their competitors. “I have my own delivery vehicles,” Edward says.

Edward is so passionate about his work and his customers that it is difficult for him to think about anything outside of it. “As a business owner you spend most of your time at work,” he says. “My wife tries to get me to do other things, but if I take some time off it is always in the back on my head that I should be at work”

But it is more passion than necessity that keeps Edward at work. “I have a great staff, so I am very lucky there,” he says. “And with technology, I am never very far away if they do need me for something.”

“I go on vacations when I can,” Edward says. “We take a summer vacation and a winter vacation and get away for a bit. I also like working on my car and relaxing by the pool in the summer.”

Edward’s generation is the first generation of Cantor’s to live in Tuxedo. “We all moved when the Talmud Torah School on Matheson closed and they built the Rady Centre,” he says. “We all moved, my family and kids and my siblings as well.”

He enjoys his life in Tuxedo. “It is a nice area to raise your family in,” he says. “It is well looked after and the people are great.”

Edward admits that when he first moved to Tuxedo, it was easy to find out where his home was. “I used take the store van home and park it in the driveway, and with Cantor’s written all over the van, so it is a rolling billboard,” he says.

“It is great publicity, but it is a little much and it doesn’t suit the neighbourhood, so I stopped doing it,” he adds with a laugh.

Being easily recognized sometimes can be challenging, especially when someone sees him shopping in a rival grocery store; “‘Why are you shopping here?’ they ask. ‘It’s part of customer service. If customers want things I don’t carry, I go out and get them what they need,’ I reply.”

Edward eventually plans to retire someday, possibly in a condo in Tuxedo, but that is still in the far-flung future. For now, he plans to continue serving his customers to the best of his ability and continuing to maintain and build the reputation of Cantor's Quality Meats and Groceries.