

'Country Town in City'

On Knox, They Take Pride in Job

By TOM JOHNSON

It's people like Charlie Day that make Knox Street a town within a city.

Day started pulling sodas on Knox Street back in 1825 when he was 18 years old. He's still behind the fountain at the Highland Park Pharmacy today, 44 years later.

"I was raised right here in the area," Day says, "and I don't ever plan to leave."

Knox Street is only four blocks long but it's crammed with barber shops, flower shops, cafes, taverns, beauty shops, shoe shops, cleaners and just about every other kind of retail outlet known to the mind of man. Or woman.

In all, there are 87 businesses.

"It's kind of like a country town," says L. L. Douglas of the Flower-a-Day Shop.

"MOST EVERYBODY knows everybody else. Women don't mind shopping in slacks and with their hair rolled up.

"A lot of retired people have moved close to Knox Street so they can just walk over," Douglas adds.

Knox is bounded to the east by North Central Expressway and to the west by the Katy tracks, which mark the boundary line between Highland Park and Dallas. It is roughly in the center of a rectangle with corners at downtown, Love Field, North Park Shopping Center and White Rock Lake.

Some observers say this centrality gives the street its flavor. Others cite its proximity to Highland Park. Some say the many retired people. Others talk of the longevity of its business places.

Whatever the reason, it's different.

One tavern owner put it this way:

"THE OLD-TIMERS set the tone of the place. They're gentlemen and treat others as gentlemen. 'Preacher' there is 84. He has

trouble walking but comes in every day to talk things over.

"'Pappy Hill' and 'Smiley' are the same way. They form sort of a neighborhood committee."

Mrs. Dewey Goodman, co-owner of the Highland Park Cafeteria and known to her employes as "Mrs. Carolyn," said her famous establishment has been on Knox Street for 43 years.

"There's a charm to established places that can't be easily duplicated," she said. "Of course, we've never considered being elsewhere.

"Knox Street is just our home. We've always felt the place would be good to us if we were good to it."

Mrs. Goodman said the cafeteria has third-generation ownership feeding fourth-generation customers.

TRADITIONALLY LONG sidewalk lines attest to the fact that the cafeteria makes its own bread, desserts and salad dressings. There is a wide variety of dishes, all cooked according to Goodman family recipes.

"You could call it Southern cooking," Mrs. Goodman said.

Many steady, old-line customers know the people in the serving lines by name. It's an exception when an employe quits before retirement, Mrs. Goodman said.

"They take pride in their work," she added.

An employe of another Knox Street flower shop said there has been some talk of blocking the street off at both ends and making it into a mall.

"AFTER ALL, it was one of the first shopping centers in Dallas. If traffic keeps on increasing, too many buildings will have to be torn down for parking lots. Some of

the architecture here is rather elaborate," he said.

He also said the contiguity with Highland Park was the major element in the Knox Street atmosphere, influencing the architecture and the quality of many shops.

Ray Weir, the owner of Weir's Furniture, said he located his firm on Knox in 1949 "because it's the convergence point of Dallas."

Weir and other merchants remarked that many people who have moved away from the area to outlying districts still shop on Knox Street.

"You have a close personal touch with most customers," he said. "I wouldn't trade this place for any other location. We love Knox Street.

"You go back into the past a little bit here. More and more people nowadays are searching for something stable, something they can hold on to," Weir said.

Something of the same kind was voiced by Sam Wilson, owner of the Knox Street Pub.

"I COULD HAVE LOCATED anywhere in Dallas I wanted to," Wilson said, "but I never considered any area other than Knox Street.

"The people are great around here, whether they're old or young. The street generates a feeling of community. It's like a small town 20 years ago, it has this aura about it," Wilson said.

Soda expert Day said he makes all his dishes and drinks "the same way I did when I first started working here. I can still make a good country shake."

Day explained that a country shake is made by putting ice, flavoring and milk in two malt cans, putting them together and shaking them.

"People don't ask for them anymore. But I've sure made a lot of strawberry ones in my day," he said.

Day is vice-president of the pharmacy, which was incorporated about 1940. Other officers are R. E. Wheelis, president and clerk; F. F. Bell, vice-president and pharmacist; and Mrs. Lillie May Maples, book-keeper and secretary-treasurer.

Bell said he actually couldn't talk much about Knox Street because he's only worked there 29 years. But he did say that when he started, he compounded prescriptions by hand, whereas "all we do now is just count and pour."

ALTHOUGH KNOX STREET doesn't look as modern as some new shopping centers, the quality of merchandise sold and work performed is considered high.

There are some new buildings, though, the most conspicuous being the Safeway supermarket.

Many places have been converted from one use to another as ownership changed. The old Knox Street Theater building, for example, is now the Phantasmagoria, a psychedelic night spot.

An older atmosphere seems to help some establishments, notably The Quiet Man, described by owner Mike Carr as one of the county's major outlets for a popular brand of beer. Carr, born in Ireland, also serves English and Irish brew.

Bill James, bearded and bespectacled, says he's "the artist of Knox Street.

"I've been sketching for 25 years," James says, "in Hollywood and Greenwich Village, but let me say this:

"Knox Street is the greatest street I've ever sketched on."