



Lloyd Raymond "Mick" Gross and Herman Pugsley chat with a McDonald's employee who drops by to visit.

Daleville relic

51-year-old gasoline station's patina matches well-loved family antique

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An antique countertop overwhelms the boxy interior of the gas station at Ind. 67 and Walnut Street in Daleville.

Behind the counter stands the station's manager, Lloyd Raymond Gross. The people who address him as "Mr. Gross" receive only joking replies such as "Who's that?" or "He's in the hospital." Far more people know him simply as "Mick" and that roster grows daily.

From behind the counter, Mick entertains with everything from playing board games to

distributing the latest news. His task is something he's been doing for 20 years.

"I had someone offer to buy this counter once and I said, 'No way, I'll be buried in it,' Mick says. "I've got double elbows from leaning on it so much."

The antique countertop is just one of the many relics of the station's past. Mick has worked to maintain the originality of the more than half-a-century-old gas depot. The original state is nothing foreign to the 49-year-old operator.

The station, built in November of 1937, was the

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first one on the highway. It was the only gas stop between Anderson and Muncie," Mick says. "It used to be you could tell what day it was by who stopped by. Now gasoline is so expensive that people just fill up when they have the money."

Mick's career with the station began when he was 29. He worked for Alva Betteron, brother-in-law of the station's present owner, 92-year-old Martin Davis.

"Alva worked at one of the factories and said he wanted to take on the business when he retired, but once he retired, he decided he didn't want to have anything to do with the station, so I took it on," Mick says. "I thought then it would only last a week and here I still am."

The business has become habit-forming for Mick, a Daleville native who continues to live with his parents in the same house he was born at 611 W. Fifth St.

"I could be a hermit if I wasn't so nibby. I have to know what's going on," he says. Because of Mick's wealth of news, his place of business is nicknamed the "information station" and the hinges of his front door are constantly on the move.

Among his usual customers are Daleville resident Harmon Pugsley and Town Marshal Jim Orr. But the locals aren't the only ones who keep up-to-date on Mick's latest news.

One wall in the station is covered with hundreds of Polaroid pictures of customers from coast to coast.

"Those are all my CB'ers," Mick says. "Mostly truckers."

As Mick's customers dodge the potholes dotting the driveway and make their way inside the small white building, they are fascinated by the character of his station. The rough wooden floors lead the way to the center counter. An old-time Marathon Travel Bureau Service carrier hanging on the wall is filled with maps. Equally dated are a Linco tire patch kit, a gossip bench and a water pump in the corner.

A pay phone hanging on the wall has its own story.

"About three years ago I was here one day and there weren't many people here so I was just going to clean up the garage," Mick recalls. "Some guy drove up in a Cadillac and ordered \$2 worth of gas, which I didn't think was anything unusual. He got a pack of cigarettes and then pulled a gun on me. He came into the station and shot the phone before he took off with the money."

The only other misfortune Mick has witnessed was when a motorist struck the side of the building and shook it from the foundation. A few gas pumps have been hit in the past and several years ago, a dump truck leveled the station's outhouse.

"The outhouse was such a part of the station that everyone kept asking if we were going to rebuild it," Mick says. When he finally announced that he would indeed rebuild the outhouse, the insurance company told him it would be

cheaper to build a facility inside, he says.

"We had some people stop by the other day and ask where our restroom was. When I pointed to the outhouse, they said, 'We want to use the same one you use.' I said, 'That's it,'" Mick says.

Most days are pretty peaceful at the station. The only problems Mick has experienced are with a few mischievous teens.

The most damage they've ever done is taking one of his "girlie calendars" and swiping a few sandwiches from the refrigerator.

Most of them bring him souvenir plaques from their school trips to hang in his station. One of the plaques reads: "Loud Boisterous Behavior Shall be Kept to a Minimum." Another sign reads: "We guarantee fast service no matter how long it takes."

It gets kind of cluttered in here sometimes," Mick says. "One day, we had as many as 32 people in here. If the kids come in here to play hooky, they know they'll hear me gripe. I'm always giving them lectures."

On one occasion, Mick had so many youngsters in the station that he chased them off with fly spray. "I think they ganged up on me just to drive me nuts," he says with a laugh.

In a more somber tone he adds, "No. Really, I've got a lot of nice people who come in here. I really miss the older ones who have passed on. They used to tell me a lot of old stories. But there are others who keep coming in. I must be doing something right because they never stay away very long."

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