

# This grocer has a long history of success

THE BILLY MARTIN of the food industry may soon be on the move again as an outgrowth of all the turmoil within the Chatham Supermarket chain, and if so I'll gamble that he will land on both feet, scrappy and well paid — just like his baseball counterpart.

It has been just under 15 months since golden boy Wendell Smith came back to his native Michigan as chairman, president and co-owner of newly formed Nu-Trax Inc., announcing purchase of the then 41-store Chatham empire for a reported \$17 million.

**BESET BY** unanticipated financial woes, the once proud empire came apart at the seams as store after store had to be closed and sold. Whether any will remain open after this week is a matter of day-to-day conjecture.

Smith still is president of Nu-Trax, but he has no control. That rests entirely with Alex Dandy, the new board chairman who has an option to buy out Smith and his partners. Dandy owns the Hamady Supermarket group based in Flint, as well as other stores in the Saginaw area, and well over a year ago was approached relative to a possible merger with Chatham. Now he's trying to save a sinking ship.

I DON'T know any more about the supermarket business than one can



through bifocals

**Fred DeLano**

learn by pushing a grocery cart down the aisles, and I won't lose any sleep over whether my neighborhood Chatham store operates under that or some other logo. The angle that has intrigued me from the start deals with this Smith fellow; just who is he?

If you're about his same age, 52, you quite likely know him — or of him — and definitely you do if you were active in the Jaycees of your community in the '60s. Many of you also know his wife, Margaret.

A small town boy from up Hemlock way, Wendell found her on the Michigan State University campus and wooed her into a marriage that took her from her beloved Birmingham where her father, Dwight Ireland, served as superintendent of schools for about 20 years. As Mrs. Smith, she has moved 17 times.

A Spartan graduate of '55, Smith was hired by Kroger as a management trainee and was assigned to a Kroger

store on Forest Avenue in Plymouth. He bagged groceries, dusted the shelves and within 13 years was zone manager over 11 stores in the Detroit area doing a weekly sales volume of \$500,000.

Not only did the Smiths set up house-keeping in Plymouth, Wendell also joined the Plymouth Jaycees. In the same fast-paced manner that saw him elected to office in 23 campus organizations at MSU, it was inevitable that he would rise to the presidency of that local Jaycee unit.

**THAT WAS** in 1963, but did he stop there? Of course not. In 1966 he was chosen president of the Michigan Jaycees, and a year later as one of the national vice presidents.

In the national convention of 1968, with seven candidates in the contest and after more than 20 ballots, Wendell Smith was elected president of the United States Jaycees and his world changed. This was a one year's full-time job, headquartered in Tulsa, Okla.,

and so Wendell quit Kroger and never looked back.

He was 34 and king of the hill. You will recognize some of these names among fellow junior lightningbugs of that era who helped put him there: Pat Nowak, Terry West, Jack Duggan, Roy Jacobson, Ray Steele and Don Sharritt.

When he returned to real life in 1969, Smith went with Colonial Stores Inc., working four years out of Cincinnati, Columbus and St. Petersburg. Then came three years with P.A. & S. Small Co. of York, Pa. Next there was a four-year stint with Louis Lehrman & Son Inc., at Shiresmantown, Pa.

A year on the payroll of Liberal Markets Inc. at Dayton was followed by four in Chicago as president and chief executive officer of Certified Grocers of Illinois, Inc., with an annual salary well into six digits.

**THESE WERE** tough, creative positions. Tough decisions were worth heavy dollars. Wendell was a firefighter, brought aboard to boost business. He recalls that in a couple of instances he saw it triple, but always he was an employee. Always there was a gnawing in his innards to come back to Michigan as the boss.

When he put together the combine that bought Chatham in May 1985, that aspiration became a reality. The three children born to Margaret were all adults by now and when they visit their parents it's in an elite hilltop neighborhood in Plymouth Township which a Korger trainee never could have afforded as a bagboy 31 years ago.

Wendell always has been a go-getter, one of those guys who can crank it up as he goes through a day trying to be two places at once — and sometimes succeeding. As his house of entrepreneurial cards comes tumbling down, he insisted to me a few days ago, "This thing isn't over. I'm not very optimistic, but it isn't over."

He's a realist who still can laugh easily, who swears as often as he laughs, and who is booked often across the nation by business groups who want a motivational speaker. Even if the Chatham dream goes down the tube completely, he says, "I never will retire."

Just one bit of advice, Sir Smith: Your feeling for Michigan and the food industry is great to behold. But as they say around race tracks, "Don't fall in love with your horse; you may have to eat the SOB some day."

## from our readers

Letters must be original copies and contain the signature and address of the sender. Limit letters to 300 words.

### Communism - danger to freedom

To the editor:

I am appalled at our country's attitude toward the friendly nation of South Africa and can longer remain silent on this issue.

South Africa is a pro-western, anti-Communist country. While I do not support "apartheid," I believe the danger to freedom everywhere is international communism, not South Africa.

If we are so concerned about the "human rights" of blacks in other countries, why have the hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians who have been murdered by their own Marxist government been ignored? What about the more than 1 million Afghans murdered by the Soviets?

Both our government and news media ignore or minimize atrocities committed by Communists, while working to turn another pro-western country over to the Communist bloc. Does anyone

honestly believe South Africa will be "better off" under communism like the blacks of Ethiopia?

The majority of blacks killed by violence in South Africa have been killed because they did not support the Communist "Freedom Fighters" . . . murdered by the criminals our government and news media now openly support.

**I BELIEVE** that what is happening in Washington with regard to South Africa constitutes giving aid and comfort to our nation's enemies, which amounts to treason. South Africa is the only country in the free world from which certain rare metals are found. These metals are vital to American defense. Thus, our present policy toward this friendly nation is suicidal as well as cowardly and treasonous.

We have systematically sold out one friend after another to the Reds (e.g. Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, etc.). When will this policy of aiding Communists end? Will South Africa be next?

Gerald N. Wiggins,  
Canton

### Local teens need something to do

To the editor:

I would like to make a few comments regarding the article on the front page of the July 10 Plymouth Observer about teens loitering at night in downtown Plymouth.

I have two teen-agers who have lived in Plymouth most of their lives. Thankfully, they are both living responsible lives. However, when they were growing up, I always lamented the lack of recreational things for them to do in Plymouth. (At least I was unaware of anything that didn't cost something.)

Now that they are teen-agers, they have from time to time complained that there is nothing to do at night in Plymouth except "cruise around."

Why can't an alternative to "loitering" be created for teen-agers? It is a basic axiom in life; you can't take something away without providing a

substitute. There already exist some good programs for teens like Growth Works.

Perhaps some comments from teen-agers themselves in designing some kind of reasonable solution could be encouraged in your newspaper and ways of funding such a thing investigated.

Does anyone care about the kids themselves?

Susan Crawley,  
Canton

### Aug. 5 primary is an important one

To the editor:

The upcoming Aug. 5 primary election is an important one for all voters. In this election, candidates are elected to represent the major parties on the November ballot for governor, U.S. representative, state Senate, state representative, Wayne County executive

and Wayne County commissioner.

You will also be electing precinct delegates to the major party conventions who in turn will determine who the candidates for president will be in 1988.

This year, Canton Township will be using the punch-card voting system. Please take time to understand this new system. In order for your vote to count, you may only vote for one party from governor to precinct delegate.

If you cross over, the complete partisan part of the ballot will be void when it is tabulated by the computer. There will be an election worker at each polling location to completely explain the system and you may even practice on a sample ballot. Aside from the partisan part of the ballot, there are also non-partisan candidates and the Canton Public Library millage issue.

We encourage each registered voter to exercise his/her right to vote on Tuesday, Aug. 5. Absentee ballots are available at the township clerk's office.

Elaine J. Kirchgatter,  
president,  
Canton Republican Club

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