



## *A Day at Clare Hardware*

By Abigail Kulick, Main Street Manager

For one hundred years Clare Hardware has been loyally serving the Clare community as its primary family owned hardware store. From 1905 to 2005 Clare Hardware has been opening its doors and sharing its heart with many generations of Clare families. Monday, February 28<sup>th</sup> it did the same for me; I was generously welcomed by store owner, Vince Demasi with a *Do It Best* Clare Hardware button down work shirt. As the clock struck 8:30am I suited up and began learning the tricks of the trade in the hardware business.

Vince and his employees trained me well and turned me loose in the store to assist customers on the sales floor. From customizing paint colors to manning the register to making keys, I (with a little help) could do it all! While spending the day with Vince Demasi I gained a whole new knowledge and appreciation of the hardware business. Don't be too surprised now if you see me walking around Main Street with the addition of a tool belt to my every day attire. After working at Clare Hardware I have the *over-inflated* confidence that I am a regular old Miss Fix-it!

Clare Hardware has established itself on Clare Main Street for a complete century and has contributed one hundred years of history to the culture of the downtown community. Downtown Clare is where the history of the city remains, its historic buildings reveal the character and integrity of the hardworking business men and women who have had made their honest livings here. Each building tells a tale not only of the history of the current business that resides in it, but of each business that has been part of Clare Main Street since the beginning. Vince Demasi can say with pride that, although

owners have changed in the last century, the history of Main Street's Clare Hardware is just that: a hardware store; it has been the center where the people of Clare have come to purchase their hardware supplies for the past one hundred years.

Clare Hardware was opened in 1905 by Webb, Galligher & Calkins which eventually turned into Galligher & Mercer. After owning a True Value hardware store in Elmira and Rockford, Stanley Burdo moved to town and purchased the True Value Clare Hardware Store in 1936. Stanley Burdo is the grandfather of Vince's wife, Elaine Demasi. Clare Hardware has remained in the family since that purchase in 1936. With the aging of time, the store was sold to the next family generation, Ben & Marge Burdo, Elaine's parents, and once again in 1971 to Vince Demasi.

As store owner, Vince Demasi has led Clare Hardware through tremendous changes, for instance, about eight years ago Vince made the decision to change from a True Value hardware store to a Do it Best hardware store. A new brand brought a new name, colors, supplier, and inventory to Clare Hardware. Vince considers change to be the most exciting, as well as the most frightening part of the business. Addressing new changes in the market each year has been a fun challenge for Clare Hardware. Vince remembers the first year he saw a hand held electric hair dryer at market. Excited about the new product, Vince predicted it would be the newest trend and confidently ordered a large supply. Family, friends and critics didn't think the product would even move from the shelf. To the surprise of many, the hand held electric hair dryer proved to be the hottest item that Christmas season. Witnessing products come and go is just part of the business and although a good old fashioned hammer is still a necessity, somewhere down the line screwdriver sales went down and the demand for drill bits went up as we realized that innovation is no stranger to the hardware business.

Clare Hardware is the modern day General Store; it is a place where you can get anything from a completely stocked toolbox, to kitchen appliances, to house paint, to a delicate wedding gift like a piece of collectible Fenton glassware. General Stores were known to be places where people would go to figure out how to solve their problems, whether it was a plumbing backup, a burnt out light bulb or to cure your sweet tooth, you would go to the General Store. Vince's hardware store satisfies the same demands and desires on Clare Main Street that a General Store once would have.

Thirty-four years ago Vince Demasi was the new kid on the block. Now he is a Main Street Veteran with 100 years and 11,000 square feet of hardware history behind his business. Family businesses are run with love and it is only appropriate that they make their home in the heart of the community. The Demasi's have donated their love to Clare Hardware, its faithful customers and downtown Clare for thirty-four years. Their love and generosity has been appreciated by all. I am especially grateful to Vince and Elaine for the kindness they have shown me, the *newest* new kid on the block. They have gone out of their way to make me feel at home in downtown Clare and have passed on their love of Main Street, both past and present, for me to inherit. Clare Hardware has been a downtown treasure for one hundred years and Clare Main Street looks forward to sharing one hundred more with this historic family-owned business.