



## *A Day at The Emporium*

By Abigail Kulick, Main Street Manager

Emporium: em-po-ri-um (noun) 1. store offering wide selection of goods 2. marketplace or center of trade

Monday morning, January 17, 2005 I headed off for The Emporium at 9:30am ready for work. When I walked through the backdoor I found two dedicated employees preparing the little store for Monday's business; arranging the fudge under the viewing glass, stocking the refrigerator and brewing the daily blend of coffee. The Emporium is, just as it is defined, a store offering a wide selection of goods, it is a collection of gifts ranging from jelly beans to rare collectibles.

The Emporium has a long history on Clare's Main Street. It began as Anderson Drugs, a pharmacy to treat the people of downtown. George T. PUNCHES began his career at this pharmacy and eventually bought the business from Bud Anderson in the early 1970's. The pharmacy once had a soda counter with an authentic soda fountain; in fact some of Downtown Clare's favorite people spent their days behind that counter, including Mrs. Jane Seibt, once known as a fabulous soda girl! The downtown pharmacy and soda shop was a gathering place for kids and adults alike. No one could resist the fine tasting treats and impeccable service that were promised at the downtown pharmacy.

Although times have changed and downtown Clare's demand for a small pharmacy weakened as the North end of town boomed, I have come across many people who are proud to say that they made memories while sipping old fashioned sodas and catching up with friends around the counter of Anderson's Drugs and for that the little downtown drug store will always hold a place in their hearts.

After the prescription drugs, over the counter remedies, and pharmacists with white lab coats were packed up and moved down the street in the early 1980's George PUNCHES turned the 518 North McEwan Street location into Connie and Margaret's

Hallmark Shop. Jeff Punches, son of George and Margaret told me that between Connie and Margaret's Hallmark Shop and Maxwell's Flowers a shopper could be guaranteed to find any collectible they were looking for Downtown Clare.

The late 80's brought a new name to George Punches' downtown business once again. At this time George Punches renamed his business The Emporium. The Emporium, as we know it today fits its name well; it is a marketplace, a center for trade offering a large variety of goods. Daily at The Emporium you can find 36 flavors of Jelly Belly brand jelly beans, 10 flavors of ice cream, 15 flavors of fudge, 22 flavors of gourmet bulk coffee beans, and countless options of specialty coffee drinks, made right in front of you. The Emporium is complete with a state of the art espresso machine that is promised to make your very favorite Kool Beans coffee drink to keep you warm on these snowy winter days. Kool Beans offers espresso, latte, cappuccino, café au lait, mocha, chai tea, steamers, iced coffee and smoothies. With all these choices even those who have never enjoyed coffee in the past can catch on to the coffee craze with Kool Beans. Obviously you know that you can find a way to cure your sweet tooth at the Emporium but did you also know that you can find Carlton Greeting Cards for over 100 occasions, helium balloon bouquets, shelves stocked with Yankee Candles, hard to find Department 56 village collectible sets and much, much more.

A couple years ago Mr. George T. Punches sold The Emporium and his pharmacy businesses to his three children, Jeff Punches, John Punches and Ann Reeves. Collaboratively they have become Punches Management Group, Inc. Jeff, John and Ann spend their days at Punches Pharmacy Plus and have relied on Sharon Michaels to run the day to day production at The Emporium for the last four years.

Sharon Michaels has been the manager of The Emporium since October of the year 2000; she has put her heart and soul into that little business. Monday morning I was lucky enough to witness the love she has for the store. Over the course of my day I watched Sharon greet every single customer as if they were her next door neighbor. Her enthusiasm for the store and its products encouraged the customers to stay and shop; and of course no one was able to slip away without staring at, and usually sampling the fudge! The addition of Nana's fudge to The Emporium's product line is what Sharon has enjoyed most throughout her years at the downtown specialty shop. Nana's fudge is a genuine homemade treat! The fudge is named after Margaret Punches, a truly loving *Nana* to six amazing grandchildren. With Nana's support and fondness for the fudge The Emporium is able to sell the delicious dessert quite well. Although Sharon is still waiting to be blessed with grandchildren of her own so she can truly be a nana, it is Sharon's sweetness that makes Nana's fudge so irresistible. Sharon adds her loving touch and creative mind to fudge recipes to make her own delicious concoctions. She states, "We are only limited by our imagination." Sharon can make over fifty flavors of fudge and definitely relies on her imagination when inventing new recipes and naming her sweet treats!

Nana's homemade fudge is on the road in the spring and summer months when Sharon represents The Emporium at craft shows. She told me that Nana's fudge sells so well at the shows that it is a rare occasion if she has any left to bring home at the end of the day. Nana's fudge can also be found seasonally at Punches Pharmacy Plus and Fun Stuff, a gift shop in Onekama.

When asked about Sharon, Jeff Punches said, “Sharon is a positive face for The Emporium. For someone who doesn’t own a business she has taken on a lot of ownership over the store. Many people think she is the owner of The Emporium. That is exactly what we were looking for when we hired her. We couldn’t be happier with what she has done for the business over the years.” Jeff expressed to me that he really enjoys watching Sharon do her magic at the craft shows. “It’s amazing how well she works the crowd. A lot of people at the shows think she is Nana and it is funny how Sharon just plays along. When they ask her for the recipe she just smiles and says *it’s a family secret!*”

I am fortunate to have met Tracy and Chrissy who also work at The Emporium. Like Sharon, these women love the store and value every minute they spend there. They enjoy chatting with regular customers and tourists spending their day shopping on Clare’s Main Street. Everyone who walks in the door has a different story to tell and the women at the Emporium delight in listening to those stories. It’s hard to say whether Tracy and Chrissy were naturals when they were hired or if working with Sharon has molded them into wonderful saleswomen. Regardless of how it happened, the women at The Emporium are the kind of salespeople everyone hopes for when they walk into a store.

From an old fashioned soda fountain to a shiny new espresso machine, the Punches’ Main Street business has stood the test of time and trend. The Punches Management Group willingly adapts with the times and therefore is rewarded with a determinedly successful business. The future will bring new fads which will once again require the Punches to adjust to life on Main Street, but we have seen them do it before and it will be no surprise when they do it again.