



TOM'S RIVERSIDE (814) 797-2240

For January 2015 the Mayor's Spotlight is going to shine on another long time Knox business we all know as "TOM'S RIVERSIDE QUALITY FOODS" over on Miller Street / SR338.

The history of TOM'S RIVERSIDE coming to Knox begins back across town on Ohio Street (near the present day fire hall) where Frank Battista was operating a grocery store many remember as a "Super Duper" and later it changed to "Shop & Save"..... In the middle of 1977, Tom Ray Sr. saw the opportunity to open up this Battista property as another "Tom's Riverside" in Knox Pa and operate it in the same tradition as his successful New Bethlehem store he opened in 1970.

Tom Ray Sr.'s career in the grocery business began while in still high school, delivering groceries for Acme Markets in the early 1940s in Indiana, Pa. After serving in the Navy in World War II, he attended the University of Pittsburgh in Johnstown, then rejoined Acme and in 1949 at age 24 became a store manager in Brookville. In 1951, Paul Reitz hired Tom to join his fledgling chain called Riverside Markets. He started out as the produce manager at the Brookville Riverside but soon became a store manager, helping to open and manage larger and larger stores for Riverside in Clearfield, Johnstown and Sharon. When a Riverside franchise program was started in 1970, Tom was one of four corporate store managers to be offered a chance to own their own store. He was so successful at operating grocery stores, he later opened stores in Knox, Rimersburg and Ford City. Sadly, Tom Sr. passed away in 1998, but his philosophy of operating clean, well stocked and friendly stores continues to this day.

Tom Ray Jr. was born into the grocery business, being just five years old when his father opened the New Bethlehem Tom's Riverside. His first job was cleaning the restrooms, but later was "promoted" to racking and stacking the cases of glass pop bottles and burning cardboard in the incinerator on stock nights. At age fourteen and throughout high school, Tom worked as stocker and packer. He attended IUP to study Business Management. During that time, he worked in the restaurant business, cashiered at a Riverside in Indiana and worked as a summer intern with Riverside, traveling with the District Manager, Department Specialists and spending time in the corporate office to learn more about the industry. After graduation, Tom entered the management training program for Weis Markets and with his experience was in management a short six months later. Upon spending a few years learning the trade with Weis Markets in Virginia and Maryland, Tom returned home to Pennsylvania in 1990 to start a family and return to the family business.

The Knox store on Ohio Street was well received and operated there for many years. In the early 90's they felt the need to expand into a larger store, to give the residents in the Knox area a fresh new store with more variety, services and departments. A new location was found, purchasing the present day store property from Terry Kahle in 1991. Tom Jr. told me his father (Tom Sr.) would fondly recall having "many a lunch at Mac's Grill" with Terry Kahle while they were building the new store on Miller Street / SR 338. On February 23rd 1992, the new store was ready and they officially opened for business.

With the new store, along came a Pharmacy! King's Pharmacy was purchased locally, and as part of the deal Ken Buchanan agreed to come along and operate it. Then in 1995, FARMERS BANK of Emlenton moved in to the Knox store, both entities did so well an expansion was done for the bank in 2001 that quadrupled their original footprint. The pharmacy was also enlarged and another aisle to the store was added. The Bank and Pharmacy also feature a drive thru window.

A Bakery & Deli was also included at the new location baking fresh bread and rolls daily. They have super meat department at Toms with experienced in house cutters who are always on hand to custom cut your orders. Fresh Produce is shipped in several times a week, they can make up veggie or fruit trays for any occasion. The store is now a "one stop shop" these days, serving the Knox area customers well in all areas.

We all know someone who works at, or has worked at Tom's Riverside in Knox. Great people down there! I'm hesitant to start mentioning names as the list would be long and I'm sure I would forget somebody. They're all a great friendly bunch, Randy Gould is the present day manager at the Knox location. Randy is a great guy who came to Knox from the Rimersburg store, lives in New Bethlehem and has been working with the Ray family since the early days. Tom's Riverside is a fantastic employer for all of Clarion County, presently employing some 105 people from the area. Tom's Riverside has a great history of support to our local community with kind donations or discounts to our sports teams, churches, school activities, local festivals, emergency services, Clarion County United Way, Clarion County Fair, Clarion Hospital....the list goes on and on, they are a great friend in support of our community.

We are lucky to have this fine store in Knox. There's no doubt about it, Tom's Riverside is great for Knox, serving our community with quality goods and services. I wish to formally say thanks to the RAY family for their investment in our community, they run a fantastic operation there. People come from miles around to go shopping at Tom's Riverside in Knox Pa. It's a great thing we have here in Knoxerland.