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Walt Wiley: Old grocery stores never die; they are just recycled, remarketed

By Walt Wiley -- Bee Columnist - (Published July 22, 2004)

'Did you bring bottles?': David Gwynn remembers when the checker at the market asked that question before starting to ring up groceries. It's such a fond memory that he has a Web site under that headline devoted to old grocery stores.

That was in the days when beer and soda bottles were refilled, and the companies wanted them back to refill, even charged a deposit so the customers would bring them back.

David remembers going with his mother to the old A&P store in Greensboro, N.C., where he grew up. "It was always cool and dark and mysterious. My mother didn't like it, but I found it fascinating," he said.

Now he's scouring historical records to find the sites of the old markets, then visiting to see what's there today, posting his findings on his Web site, [www.groceteria.com](#).

In the late '20s and early '30s, there was a Safeway at 2760 21st St. Now it's College Cyclery. A few blocks away at Freeport Boulevard and 19th Street, there was another Safeway in the '40s and '50s, now Taylor's Market.

The oldest market in the area still in business was a Piggly Wiggly in 1928, then a Safeway in the '30s, and since 1945, the Choice Food Market at 2103 P St.

Piggly Wiggly, an Eastern chain, had an early presence in California. But Safeway bought it out after it was formed by Charles Merrill of Merrill-Lynch fame from the merger of Northern California's Skaggs Stores and Southern California's Sam Seelig Stores, David said.

"These things are always changing," David said. "That's what's fascinating about tracing the history." ...

Hot rod: When Corey Cummings was faced with laying out \$20,000 or so for a new ride after his old commute rig gave up the ghost, he did what any red-blooded Land Park resident would do.

He bought a 1947 Ford Coupe and spent 3 1/2 years of Saturdays turning it into a cruising beauty with a Corvette undercarriage and a fuel-injected Ford 302 V-8 engine, all done up in black-cherry paint with ghost flames.

He and his old school chum, Phil Ferrari, a professional rod builder, did the job under Phil's guidance, Corey said.

Now that it's complete, it's his daily driver. It's entered in a contest in the September Rod & Custom magazine. Called the "Ego-Rama," the contest has 20 cars travel from San Francisco to Los Angeles in a week, during which they're put through their paces and voted on for looks, quality, speed and performance.

Even his wife, Judy, loves the car, Corey said. "She likes riding in it, the way people wave. She

can't stand the car shows, though - too much car talk." ...

Speaking of cars: The Towe Auto Museum has a display these days of Jordan Cars, a line remarkable only because of the imaginative advertising used to sell them.

Ned Jordan wasn't interested in mechanics but rather in tugging at the emotions of his customers through his advertising messages, museum boss Kristin Hartley said.

"His most-remembered model was the Playboy," she said. "He had a slogan, 'Somewhere West of Laramie.' "

One Playboy ad announced "Port of Missing Men" over a nighttime picture of a house with a light in an upstairs window and a Playboy parked out front.

Four of the remaining 100 or so Jordans in the world will be on display through Aug. 14 at the Towe.

About the Writer

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