

MIDLAND COOP BEGAN ON A WHIM AND A PRAYER & PROSPERED

It was in the spring of 1937 when a group of local farmers met at the Adolph Wanous home to discuss formation of a cooperative.

They needed a manager and Henry Sommer who was just a kid at the time agreed to take the job for \$50. a month on the condition that he made a profit.

Originally the co-op sold only petroleum products and they leased a gas station from William France for \$35. a month.

Sommer had never sold anything in his life when he arrived the first day on the job. Suddenly he was caught up in pumping gas, servicing cars and keeping books for the organization.

"I hired Herb Stumme who had never been inside the cab of a truck to be bulk delivery driver. We were sure quite a pair," Sommer laughed.

The first customer that day was Alfred Walberg. He drove up in a Model T Ford assuming he would be buying gas from his old friend, France. He looked surprised as Sommer measured the depth of the gasoline in the tank under the seat with a ruler.

Sommer put $3\frac{1}{2}$ gallons of gasoline into the tank and charged Walberg 65 cents.

"He gave me a \$1 bill and I couldn't change it," Sommer laughed recalling how tight things had gotten during the depression years.

A natural born salesman and manager, Sommer never missed a payday and it wasn't long before he received his first raise.

Inflation, the influx of more people into the area, expansion of services, and diversification are responsible for the success of

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single gasoline station to a multi-building facility handling feed, fertilizers, lumber, hardware, propane gas and cattle-hauling.

Sommer helped organize the Midland Cooperative Credit Union and served as manager during the years it was located in Pine City.

Midland Co-op is rated as one of the top 500 corporations in the nation. Being secretary of the board of directors from 1967 to 1981 and on the board since 1949, Sommer was a part of the decision making body of the organization for much of his life.

When Sommer retired Eldon Johnson became manager of the Co-op and the organization has continued to grow and prosper.

"Our patrons really own the Co-op," Johnson said. "They are stockholders who elect a Board of Directors and set the policies."

Law required that 20 percent of the profits of a Co-op must be given back to the patrons in cash.

"We give 30 percent cash and the balance is returned in the form of stock," Johnson said.

By joining forces ~~see~~ when times were tough, Pine City farmers picked a winning number.

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