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Old Town Market retains its history

By Heather M. Smith, hsmith@acnpapers.com

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In its more than 30-year history, the Old Town Market has only been owned by three people. However, its new owners are a large part of its past.

Shawn and Sharon Knowles recently bought the Old Town Market from one of its original owners, Dickie Grant. In 1977, Grant and Shawn Knowles' father, Bob, opened the market. The two ran the business together until 1989 when Grant bought Bob Knowles out. Now, the ownership has come full circle.

"I think Bob would be delighted to hear that Shawn is now the owner," Grant said.

Knowles said the meat market has been his life for as long as he can remember. Both he and Grant's daughter, Marsha, were raised around the business.

"I was pretty much raised in the market," Knowles said. "I learned the business when I was a kid. I would come here after school and clean the place. By the mid-1990s I began to really think about owning this place. It is a big part of the history of the town."

Knowles and his family originally moved to Lewisville in 1967. Bob Knowles worked with Grant at Bill's Meat Market. Grant said the two decided that if they could run a meat market for someone else, they could run their own business.

"The business has been fantastic," Grant said. "We wanted to be people's personal butcher. We offer something that other chains can't. Here, there is still a small town air—we have customers who have been coming here since the 1960s, and now their kids come in to shop."

In addition to loyal customers, the market also enjoys a low turnover rate among employees.

"Our customers get to come into the market and see the same employees over and over," Knowles said. "Our employees really know the customers."

Being involved with the community was important to Grant and Bob

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Knowles. The two were founding members of the Old Town Business Association and members of the Rotary, Lions and Masonic clubs. While the two owned the market, the business participated in school events, such as Future Farmers of America (FFA). Grant said they would often employ FFA members after they graduated from high school.

"We wanted our business to be very involved in the community," Grant said.

Knowles said he plans to keep the business just as his dad and Grant envisioned it from the beginning.

"My vision for the business is to continue on the way Dickie and my dad opened it," Knowles said. "There's too much history here to change everything."

Throughout its history, celebrities such as Charley Pride and Byron Nelson have dined at the market's restaurant. The market also celebrates its anniversary each May with an enormous barbecue.

"It's got so big that we changed it from a one-day celebration to a month long celebration," Grant said. "People start calling in January to find out about the event—I just don't think we could make the celebration any bigger."

Grant said he plans to stay involved with the business even though he is moving to Clarksville. He said his son lives in Lewisville, so he will still be around.

"This isn't a situation where I'm walking out the front door forever," Grant said. "This has been such a big part of my life that I couldn't cut it out completely."

In the future, Knowles said he plans to explore using the Web to further the business.

"It is the future and we know it will work," Knowles said.

For information call 972-436-6742 or visit www.oldtownmkt.com. The Old Town Market is located at 301 South Mill St.

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