

## "Hankinson Shows Off Its Pride"

---

FARGO FORUM - 12/13/2003

By Helmut Schmidt

[hschmidt@forumcomm.com](mailto:hschmidt@forumcomm.com)

The Forum - 12/13/2003

Hankinson, N.D. - Thanks to the work of a lot of Santas, this town has received an early Christmas present.

Dyste's Food Pride, a new \$1 million grocery store, is now open on Hankinson's Main Street, giving residents thousands of new products to choose from and making community leaders optimistic that there are more good things to come.

Owners John and Julie Dyste hope to eventually double their sales with the 9,650-square-foot store, next to Lincoln State Bank.

As contractors fixed automatic doors and swept snow from the parking lot, John Dyste grinned as shoppers lined up at the cash registers and civic leaders stopped to chat and shake his hand.

"The reception and reaction of the people has made it very worthwhile. It's something I'm proud of. It's going to be good for the town," Dyste said. "We've got to give them a reason not to go to Wahpeton or Fargo" to shop for groceries.

Hankinson, population 1,058, is located 55 miles south of Fargo and 15 miles south of Wahpeton.

The new store is about 2,500 square feet larger than the old location -- a 1950s-era building that 25 years ago harbored a John Deere implement dealership. The old Jack and Jill sits empty, three blocks north on Main.

Food Pride carries about 12,500 items, compared with about 8,000 at the old location, Dyste said. The frozen food area nearly tripled in size, from 12 freezer doors to 30. The produce and meat sections are twice their former sizes and a delicatessen was added.

"We just really expanded everything -- a far greater selection of product. I think for the city of Hankinson, we're going to be able to offer them a very, very nice shopping experience," Dyste said.

The old store closed Sunday afternoon. Employees then started a hectic move of stock to the new store.

City residents were itching to load up their carts at 9 a.m. Wednesday when the new store opened its doors.

"I think it's wonderful for this town. I think they've got too much food," said Hankinson resident Agatha Herding, as she finished shopping with her husband, Philip.

"It's a good selection. Some of the shelves are already empty," she said.

"It's like the big city," exclaimed Mary Gray as she pointed her cart down the produce aisle.

"It's wonderful. I can't believe it's so great. It's a lifesaver to have a nice store in town," the Hankinson woman said.

Dyste is a fourth generation grocer. His family started in the business in 1885 in Forman, N.D.

In addition to the Hankinson store, the Dystes own three other North Dakota stores, Dyste's Food Pride in Forman, and Jack and Jills in Milnor and Lidgerwood.

"It's wild. The response from the community has just been phenomenal. They're so fired up about it," said Peggy Luneborg, general manager of the four stores, as she bounced from the office to the registers on the first day.

The new store means new jobs for Hankinson, too.

Dyste hired seven full- and part-time employees bringing the staff to 15, store manager Denise Milbrandt said. The extra staff handle deli duties and cover longer store hours.

The store is open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Reversing a trend

Dyste's store is a sign small towns have come to realize the importance of having a grocery store, said Tom Woodmansee, president of the North Dakota Grocers Association.

"I think it's fantastic. I think it reverses the trend we've been seeing," Woodmansee said, adding praise for Dyste.

"He has been a real strong supporter of his community. I can't say enough good things about him."

Woodmansee said that when he started with the Grocers Association in 1984, the state had about 450 stores. Today, there are about 250.

"People are supporting the independent grocer. If they close and go away there's not much left," in a town, he said.

Dyste's stores are supplied by and get support from Nash Finch Co.

Curtis Zahrt, the Fargo-Minot division manager, said Nash Finch has been aggressive in improving small-town stores.

His division supplies about 80 independent stores, from the large store groups like Hugo's in Grand Forks, to single store operators. It also has 12 corporate Sun Mart stores.

"If you provide them (small town residents) with a quality shopping experience, a lot of them don't want to drive" to bigger towns to shop, Zahrt said.

Nash Finch workers helped coordinate the store's construction, working with the store's general contractor Olaf Anderson and Son of Fargo.

Civic Santas

Construction on the store started in late August. Major work was just completed, though workers will add finishing touches through early January. A grand opening will likely be held in mid-January, Dyste said.

Hankinson has done a lot in the last year to revitalize its Main Street, including upgrading its sewer and water lines and paving, said Bob Wurl, the secretary-treasurer of Hankinson Community Development Corp.

Now that Food Pride is open and the city has been approved for a 22-block Renaissance Zone, the town is poised for revitalization, said Wurl, who is also president of Lincoln State Bank.

"I think the grocery store is just the beginning of something exciting for the community," he said. "It means more positive things for the gift shop, the hardware store, the pharmacy, everyone."

Lincoln State Bank acted as lead lender for the store, Dyste said, but several entities made the project happen, including:

- Dakota Certified Development Corp., which arranged a U.S. Small Business Administration loan
- Richland County Jobs Development Authority and Lake Agassiz Regional Development Corp.
- Otter Tail Power provided a grant through Hankinson CDC. The CDC also provided the store site.
- Dakota Valley Electric and Basin Electric provided low-interest loans.
- The city provided the parking lot and infrastructure improvements.

"We used every resource we could think of. The whole community is involved," Wurl said, adding the result was worth it.

"You've got to think pretty long and hard to come up with a reason to buy your groceries anywhere else."

Dyste said it was also important to him to keep the store on Main Street so the town's businesses could help each other and help keep Hankinson vital.

In the end, after many sleepless nights wondering if the project would come together well, Wednesday's opening was a good 51st birthday present for Dyste, too.

"It's very exciting. It kind of sets the tone for the day," he said. "It's a great day."