

Don Ash —the straw that stirs City Hall's drink

First, they decided to tear down the old Army and move the Doughboy statue that stands in front. But that's only about bricks, mortar and memories.

Now, after 32 years, Don Ash is leaving his concession stand in the basement of City Hall. And this is different. This is a matter of the heart.

Change is one thing. This is worse. Moreover, it's happening in a single block of High Street, altering not only its face but its soul.

They can close Polsky's and it hurts the economy. They can abandon the small shops along South Main Street and it blights the landscape. But when a real, live, breathing institution decides to get out, the moment has come to wonder what's going on here.

Happily, though, Don Ash's decision is a positive one for him, not another chink in the already badly cracked armor of downtown.

At age 52 and in an economy that has caused less adventurous, less confident businessmen to hunker down, Don Ash is spreading his wings and

Steve
Love



taking off for uncharted regions where he will test himself much as the Columbia astronauts are testing the space shuttle.

"I just felt I was in a rut," Don Ash says.

So he won his bid for a larger, cafeteria-style concession in the Bureau of Motor Vehicles building in Columbus. Given his age and the state of the economy, Ash's decision shows spunk, in and of itself. His blindness adds still another dimension.

Or does it?
"People outside the family may find his decision surprising, but I don't," says Debbie Spataro, one of Don's three

children. "And I'm not sure people who have been around him all his work life will, either."

"I don't think they're any longer amazed by what he can do."

Don Ash jests with his customers — regulars he recognizes by voice — about the void his move will leave at City Hall.

"The next guy probably will be younger, handsomer and more efficient," Don says.

Customers scoff at such a suggestion.

Younger? Maybe.

Handsome? Unlikely.

And more efficient? Never.

Don Ash's fingertips have eyes. He probably makes fewer mistakes than sighted persons.

You want a small drink? In one motion he selects the correct cup, steps back and to his right, taps the ice machine, then hands the cup to the customer to fill.

Fluid and flawless. That's the Don Ash whom Mayor Roy Ray and the City Council are honoring this week by

proclamation and party.

"From waiting on people to scrubbing down the place," Ash says, "there's nothing I don't like about this work. It makes me sad to hear people talk the way they sometimes do about their jobs."

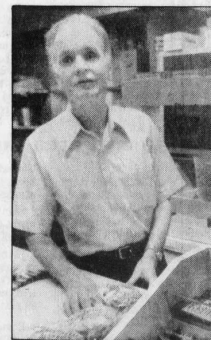
This man who was an orphan, who grew up in a foster home, who has been blind since he was 10, this man feels sorry for those who do not receive from life the satisfaction he does.

Don Ash could have gone to college. He chose not to because he wanted to become independent as soon as possible and he found this independence in the program that trains the blind to run small businesses in public buildings.

"It's the best program there is for the blind," Ash says.

He has turned it into 32 good years at Akron City Hall. Now, he and his wife, Elsie, have accepted a new challenge.

"If it doesn't work out," Ash says, "I'll just try something else." Fearlessly, no doubt.



Beacon Journal photo by Ted Walls

Don Ash at stand in City Hall

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