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Former drugstore owner recalls open arms of Meridian

By Jonathan Brunt
The Idaho Statesman

MERIDIAN — At the Meridian Drug Center, nickel candy bars sold for 4 cents and dime bars cost only 8 cents.

It was the 1950s and downtown Meridian was thriving. Meridian Drug, owned by Mary Boice and her late husband Swede, was no exception.

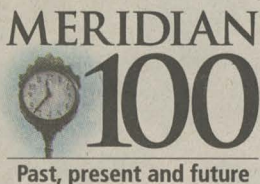
The candy discount meant that the Boices made only 2 cents on a box of 24 bars. But it gave Swede satisfaction to know that the town's

youths could afford a treat that his family couldn't when he was a kid. And it wasn't a bad business strategy, either.

"Swede said, 'We are trying to build customers for the future,' and you know what, we did build customers for the future," said Mary Boice, a healthy 88-year-old who still lives in Meridian.

She and others recall

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Memories series

The Idaho Statesman is producing a series of stories leading to Meridian's centennial celebration on Aug. 2. Share your special memories of Meridian with us. Here's how:

➤ Call reporter Jonathan Brunt at 377-6418 or West Valley editor Seth Preston at 377-6440.

➤ E-mail your thoughts to local@idahostatesman.com.

➤ Send regular mail to Memories of Meridian, Newsroom, The Idaho Statesman, P.O. Box 40, Boise, ID 83707.



Katherine Jones / The Idaho Statesman

With her arms full of newspaper clippings from decades of history, Mary Boice remembers when she and her late husband, Swede, bought the Meridian Drug Center. "This town was so friendly and so nice," she said. "We came here perfect strangers — I think we were the only people in town not related to anyone. They took us in like we were family." The Boices ran the drugstore for 22 years before selling it. It's now Idaho Independent Bank.

Drugstore

From page 1

Meridian as it was as the city prepares to celebrate the centennial of its official founding. In its 100-year history, Meridian has evolved from a quaint farm center to a bedroom community to the state's fifth-largest city.

The Boices came to Meridian in the mid-1940s so Swede could become a managing partner of Meridian Drug.

"We were the only people who weren't related to somebody in town," Mary Boice said at her Meridian home recently. "Even though Swede and I were outsiders, you could say, they took us in like we were family."

A couple years after coming to town, Swede's partner sold him the full business. Swede moved his family to the second floor of the Meridian Drug building, where they raised two children and experienced the life of what's now called Old Town Meridian first-hand.

Today, Meridian sprawls through the former dairies and farms that kept Meridian's economy afloat. When the Boices came, the town was little more than a dot on the map, with most of the action taking place on just a few blocks of downtown.

There were grocery stores, a department store, a doctor's office, a bank, a dry goods shop, a café, a pool hall, a bakery, a radio shop, another pharmacy and even a movie theater.

In Meridian, everyone knew everyone; it was the kind of town where when grocery shopping,

Aug. 2 celebration

The city of Meridian's centennial celebration is scheduled for Aug. 2. It will begin at 4 p.m. at Generations Plaza downtown with a ceremony featuring city officials and others, followed by a community-wide picnic and barbecue at Storey Park.

"you spent half the time talking to friends" you ran into, Boice said.

"Our customers were daily customers," Boice said. "Even if they didn't want anything at the drug store, they'd stop by to visit with Swede or the clerks."

Swede — whose real name was Elden but was called Swede because of his blonde hair — became a community fixture and served on the City Council and Meridian School Board. One of Swede's accomplishments on the council, Mary said, was convincing leaders to put fluoride in the city's water.

The purpose was to help kids' teeth (the same ones who were eating those 4-cent candy bars).

"He could see that it benefited the people," Boice said.

(Meridian's public works department reports that it no longer puts fluoride in the water, and it hasn't since sometime before 1980.)

Meridian Drug acted as the town's library, even before there was one. Folks would donate or borrow used books. When the town's official library opened, the Meridian Drug books became part of the collection.

On Saturday nights, folks came

to town. While the kids were at the movies, their parents visited with friends. Mary Boice remembers that the man who ran the theater was known affectionately as "the town baby sitter."

Bruce Stuart, a 1957 Meridian High School graduate, remembers frequenting the Boices' shop and other downtown Meridian establishments. Kids often walked to a fountain for a soda or the bakery for an especially giant maple bar.

"By the time you got done with one of them, you were full," he remembered fondly.

After retiring in 1967, Swede served as a substitute pharmacist in area stores and traveled the world with Mary.

Mary, who has seen most of the continents and has traversed the Amazon, said she belongs in Meridian.

"I wouldn't move from Meridian for anything because it's the most friendly town in the country," she said.

Although the town has grown so much that most Meridianites know few of their fellow residents, Boice said the city has remained friendly, and that newcomers are treated almost as well as the Boices were 60 years ago.

While she's concerned about the loss of agricultural lands, Boice said she doesn't mind the growth.

"It's just a natural progression," Boice said. "We have a lovely valley, and I can see why people live here."

To offer story ideas or comments, contact reporter Jonathan Brunt at jbrunt@idahostatesman.com or 377-6418.