

= Tom Peterson =

Tom Peterson (1930 ? July 25 , 2016) was an American retailer , pitchman , and television personality from Portland , Oregon . Peterson opened his first store in 1964 , which grew to a regional consumer electronics , home appliance , and furniture chain in the 1970s . His memorable television commercials and unusual promotions made him a widely recognized personality in the Portland area by the 1980s , leading to several cameo appearances in the films of Gus Van Sant .

In the early 1990s , having acquired and been unable to successfully integrate a competing chain of electronics stores , Peterson filed for bankruptcy protection before reemerging as a scaled @-@ down furniture retailer that offered minimal electronics . He continued appearing in his own commercials into the early 2000s , and the store 's final location closed in February 2009 .

= = Early life = =

Peterson was born outside St. Paul , Minnesota , where he grew up on a farm , the son of a federal government worker . He studied business at the University of Minnesota . Peterson met his future wife Gloria , also from the St. Paul area , at a Lutheran church camp at Green Lake in northern Minnesota at the age of 14 . The two were married on September 20 , 1952 .

= = Tom Peterson 's = =

= = = Founding and expansion = = =

Peterson spent ten years working at the Jolly Green Giant Co . , rising to eastern regional manager in charge of 17 food processing plants in the United States and Canada . However , the western regional manager was the son of the company 's president , so in 1963 Peterson obtained a franchise from Muntz television , sold his home for US \$ 10 @,@ 000 , which he put into the business , and moved with Gloria to Portland on the advice of friends .

He opened his first store at Southeast 82nd and Foster Road in 1964 . Peterson paid himself a salary of \$ 100 a week and \$ 50 a week to Gloria , who was the controller of the business . In 1964 , his first year in business , Peterson had revenues of \$ 300 @,@ 000 . By 1989 , Peterson was selling \$ 30 million per year . It was during this period that Peterson first achieved fame in Portland and throughout the Pacific Northwest .

By the early 1980s , Peterson had become one of the largest home electronics dealerships in Portland , alongside Smith 's Home Furnishings , Stereo Super Stores , Montgomery Ward and Sears . Peterson went on to open stores in Eugene , Gresham , Hillsboro , North Portland and as far away as Spokane , Washington but later closed these stores , citing an inability to offer the personal service by appearing on the floor alongside his sales staff . The Petersons ' children also worked in the business , daughter Kathy as a personnel manager and son Keith as a partner in an affiliated electronics import @-@ export business , operating out of Boston .

= = = Bankruptcy and reorganization = = =

In September 1989 , Peterson outbid two challengers to acquire Stereo Super Stores , whose parent company had filed for bankruptcy the month before , paying \$ 940 @,@ 000 plus another million for inventory . The acquisition included a car stereo specialty shop at Mall 205 , Car Stereo East . Peterson continued to operate the franchise 's locations at Jantzen Beach and Washington Square Too without a branding change until March 1991 , when he renamed them Tom Peterson Super Stores , as he did his original home electronics store at 82nd and Foster . Peterson explained that the original stores were performing better than the newly acquired outlets , so he decided to combine them . His other two stores and car specialty store were unaffected .

In August 1991 Peterson closed his Jantzen Beach location and in October filed for Chapter 11

bankruptcy protection , listing liabilities of \$ 7 @. @ 5 million owed to 283 creditors on assets of \$ 2 @. @ 7 million . He also faced lawsuits from suppliers and AT & T Commercial Finance . At the time of the filing , Peterson said : " I should have listened to my wife . She said , ' Don 't buy Stereo Super Stores . ' She was right . " Peterson said sales shrank 16 percent in the company 's 1991 fiscal year compared to 1990 , and that his business had been in the red every month but one in the 25 months since the buyout . Peterson said at the time : " They should have been called Stereo Stupid Stores . "

Peterson closed his furniture store at 82nd and Foster , consolidating all operations in his two remaining stores , but kept his ads on the air . At Gloria 's suggestion , immediate subsequent television spots referred to the bankruptcy , spelling out the troubles and asking customers to please buy today . A crisis manager took control of operations , leaving Peterson to work the sales floors until the stores closed in March 1992 . Peterson said in 1995 , " The big nationals make it very tough on the regional , like Smith 's , and on the locals , like us . " However , Peterson did not lay all of the blame on national retailers , saying " In life , we are all carpenters of our own crosses . Don 't blame someone else . "

= = = Tom Peterson & Gloria 's Too ! = = =

In September 1992 Peterson reopened for business at his original location , an 11 @, @ 000 @-@ square @-@ foot (1 @, @ 000 m2) showroom at 8130 Southeast Foster Road , under the name Tom Peterson & Gloria 's Too ! Peterson 's son @-@ in @-@ law Robert Condon became president , daughter Kathy the store 's accountant and Gloria Peterson resumed duties as chief financial officer . Peterson himself remained the primary public face of the company , and resumed his familiar advertising . Condon raised a portion of the new venture 's seed money from the sale of Tom Peterson memorabilia , having bought hundreds of wristwatches and alarm clocks from the bankruptcy trustee , then reselling them at a profit .

By 1995 Peterson and a staff of 18 were selling \$ 5 million worth of household durables per year , having shown a profit in 23 of 25 years . As of 2002 , Peterson was working " part time " 44 hours per week , half of what he once had put in , and booking \$ 4 million in sales per year . In the mid @-@ 2000s , the Petersons sold their last remaining property at the corner of Southeast 82nd and Foster and moved the store to a side street a block away , just off 82nd Avenue . The final location closed on February 28 , 2009 .

= = Television advertising = =

Peterson is widely known in Portland for writing and starring in his own low @-@ budget commercials , for his trademark flattop haircut , catch phrases including " Free is a very good price " and referring to his store as " the happy place to buy . " In the 1980s , Peterson was described by Oregonian columnist Margie Boulé as " arguably , the most recognizable man in Portland . "

Peterson 's most famous commercials were his " Wake up ! Wake up ! " spots , which began airing in the mid @-@ 1970s . Peterson borrowed the idea from another retailer in Corpus Christi , Texas . Said Peterson , " Somebody told me about it and I followed it up . Ours was much more successful than theirs . They didn 't have the store owner or a strong personality doing theirs . " Peterson kept his stores open from 11 a.m. to 3 a.m. to accommodate customers inspired by the ad to visit his store late at night . The commercial ran less frequently in the 1980s , and last aired in 1988 .

In 1987 , Peterson experimented with hiring an outside firm to produce a series of commercials , a first in 23 years on the air . The new commercials parodied daytime soap operas , featuring a housewife named Monica whose domestic problems are solved by merchandise from Peterson 's stores .

Of his television spots , Peterson said in 1987 : " It 's probably the best @-@ known commercial in town , but not the best @-@ liked one . " Peterson continued writing and starring in his own commercials into the early 2000s .

= = Special promotions = =

= = = Tom Peterson haircuts = = =

In July 1986 , Peterson offered a free flattop haircut to anyone who attended the opening of his third store at 82nd and Foster . Peterson , who got his first flattop haircut in 1952 , hired three barbers to give haircuts on the floor of his showrooms . They gave about 50 haircuts the first day , and Peterson decided to make the gimmick a weekly event . He continued offering the haircuts for two decades and as of 2002 was still giving away about ten haircuts per week .

= = = Halloween masks = = =

Starting Halloween 1986 , Peterson offered visitors free cardboard masks with his face on it . All 5 @, @ 000 went in a single year . In 1987 , Peterson said , " We thought about doing a better mask , with a more realistic Tom Peterson on it . But then we thought , what if somebody robs a bank wearing one , and the witnesses say , ' It was Tom Peterson ! ' So we 're sticking with the black and white cardboard . "

= = = Alarm clocks = = =

In October 1990 , after he had ceased running the " Wake up ! " TV spots , Peterson debuted an alarm clock in the shape of a television set with his face in the center and voice as the alarm , saying : " Wake up ! Wake up to a happy day ! " Peterson said of the promotion at the time : " If you can put your face in 5 @, @ 000 homes in Portland , it certainly can 't hurt . "

= = = Wristwatches = = =

Peterson has cited as his most successful promotion the Tom Peterson watch , also featuring his face . Peterson said in 1988 : " It particularly went well with college youth . They 're a big thing on campus . I guess it 's kind of a cult thing . " Northwest native Kurt Cobain wore a Tom Peterson wristwatch , as did David Foraker , the attorney representing the creditors in Peterson 's bankruptcy case .

= = = Other promotions = = =

Other Peterson giveaways included hats , T @-@ shirts , cups and coloring books . Peterson also turned a bus into a trolley that traveled a circuit around his parking lots on 82nd and Foster . To mark the tenth anniversary of Tom Peterson & Gloria 's Too ! and the couple 's fiftieth wedding anniversary in September 2002 , Peterson offered customers coffee mugs with photos of Tom and Gloria , fifty years ago and present day .

= = In popular culture = =

= = = Film roles = = =

Peterson has made three cameo appearances in the films of Gus Van Sant , and as of 1995 had appeared in more Van Sant films than any other actor . His first was Drugstore Cowboy , in which a Peterson commercial plays on the television . Van Sant later cast Peterson in a non @-@ speaking role as a police chief in My Own Private Idaho and used another Peterson commercial in To Die For . Peterson also appeared in Mr. Holland 's Opus , which was filmed in Portland . Van Sant related to the Los Angeles Times , " So many people responded that I decided to keep using him . " Van Sant

and Peterson have used the same video editor , Wade Evans , and Van Sant bought his Magic Chef refrigerator from Peterson .

= = = Celebrity appearances = = =

Peterson served as the best man at a wedding planned by the " Morning Zoo " of radio station KKRZ (Z @-@ 100) FM in 1989 . Professional wrestler Rowdy Roddy Piper officiated . Peterson , who had never met the 24 @-@ year @-@ old groom , called him " a very nice young gentleman . " He also played bongo drums on Where 's the Art ? , a public @-@ access television cable TV show with Stephanie Pierce , proprietor of the 24 Hour Church of Elvis .

= = = Tom Peterson art = = =

Peterson is the subject of several works by Portland artist Norman Forsberg . They include the 1989 painting " Sphinxface " and " Six Toms and a Bob " , pairing Peterson 's face with that of Bob the Weather Cat , then a fixture of KATU local news . Forsberg , on Peterson : " Most pop icons are entertainers or athletes . Whereas he 's someone selling televisions . That says something . "

Peterson 's face was also appropriated by Portland stencil artists who spray @-@ painted graffiti with the caption " Trust Tom " , often modifying pre @-@ existing " Trust Jesus " graffiti by adding Peterson 's name and face .

Tom Peterson ? s face icon and name appear on several stores in the comic book Boris the Bear # 2 , published by Portland company Dark Horse Comics and created by Portland artist James Dean Smith .

= = = In music = = =

In 1987 , Z @-@ 100 radio personality Dan Clark and musician Roger Sause wrote a song , " I Woke Up with a Tom Peterson Haircut " , which featured a singing part for Peterson . The station sold 5 @,@ 000 copies of the single , donating the proceeds to charity , and continued running the song into the 1990s . On December 14 , 1993 , during a concert Kurt Cobain wore a Tom Peterson shirt .

= = Personal life = =

During his bankruptcy , Peterson started a second business as a motivational speaker , which he continued until 2001 . Peterson lived with his wife in a one @-@ story Craftsman @-@ style home in Happy Valley , Oregon . He was a fan of upland bird hunting , specifically the chukar . In later years , he suffered from Parkinson 's disease . He died on July 25 , 2016 at the age of 86 .