



Vi, Rick and Blair King

Thirty years in the grocery trade

SAN JUAN — If you are ill, or for some reason cannot get out of your home, you can call in a grocery order to King's

Market and the store will see that it gets delivered.

"It's a holdover from the old days," says Blair King, the man who for 30 years has headed the market.

This week Blair and his wife Vi will work together, as they have 29 times in the past, to see that the dozens of details connected with their annual anniversary sale at the grocery are attended. Blair says he can't get as excited about staging a big sale today as he did in years past, but perhaps that is because his son Rick, has shouldered much of the load at the business.

And perhaps it is also because some of the theatrics are gone from the annual sales that grocery businesses used to put on. Blair remembers times when clowns were used to generate excitement by parading up Spring Street. But sales are still big projects, and this past week the Kings worked out details connected with the event.

Blair inherited the market when his father, Lyle A. King, died March 10, 1948. Lyle had established the store in the late 1920's as a means of cutting shipping costs for his meat business. Since he owned a

farm — today it is the Frank Guard place — and slaughtered meat for market in Seattle, it made sense to fill those meat trucks with goods when they turned around in Seattle and headed back to Friday Harbor. Lyle King chose groceries, and he saw to it that his trucks stocked up with them as they returned from markets in Seattle and Everett. His store on Spring Street served as an outlet for those goods.

"Make every trip count," he would say, "Vi King remembered. "And we still do today."

The original store was located in a building that stood where Friday Harbor's other grocery store, Whitey's, stands today. Later Lyle moved it to the Carter Building, where King's Toggery is now located. It was just before completing the move from that location to where the store now has its entrance that Lyle died.

Blair and Vi completed the move to the new location, boosting the store's size from one with 28 feet of frontage to one with 40 feet. Two major expansions since then have increased that frontage to 90 feet, and a few years ago, the Kings acquired an apartment building behind the store and

cleared the site for a parking lot.

What has made it worthwhile?

From the start, it has been a family business. Blair went to work for his father, first on the farm ("He always broke 'em in out there," Blair says), and then in the market. And Vi has always done part of the bookkeeping and helped out during sales. When her children were established in school, she began putting in more hours at the store. Today she puts in a full weekly shift because she enjoys it.

When Rick was in high school, he began working at the market. He left the business to attend Western State College, where he studied business, and he then put in two years in the U.S. Army. In October 1969 he returned to the store, and soon after that a family corporation was established.

The corporation is today owned by Blair, Vi, Rick and his wife Karen and by daughter Susan Passarge and her husband Bob.

Will the market remain a family business? Rick thinks so, noting that he and his wife have three children and his sister and her husband have two.