

Community Comment – Nov. 12th, 2012

This is Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

The Holiday Season is just around the corner. Hard to believe. I enjoy thinking about past Holidays as much as thinking about the upcoming ones.

I remember when I was 6 or 7, I went into Grunerts Sporting Goods in Fortuna around Christmas time and wanted to get my father a gift. I picked out a Mr. Champ fishing lure. Now my dad didn't need a fishing lure, but I asked Jay Grunert, the owner, if he thought my father would like it. Jay said, "He will be thrilled you got this for him and he'll love it." I still remember that Christmas.

Jay Grunert passed away last week at the age of 90. He was a man of kindness, compassion, loyalty, principle, integrity, honesty, intellect and unwavering commitment. At the age of 18, he was ½ owner of the old Quality Hardware in Fortuna. He was a partner in Fortuna Savings and Loan and a major stockholder and officer in Bank of Loleta before its sale to US Bank. But Jay was probably best known for owning Grunerts Sporting Goods.

This is where I had my first experience with the basics of a successful small business. Jay treated everyone with respect, took the time to talk with his customers and gave them good information and advice. I remember when I was 11 or 12, he said to me, "When I treat my customers with respect and provide them with what they need, they will come back". A simple philosophy, that is too often forgotten today. As a young teenager, I enjoyed wrapping fishing rods and occasionally cleaning reels to help out and even watched the store once in a while. I remember I wanted to own a sporting goods store. He was probably my first mentor.

There were many stories of how Jay liked to pull humorous pranks on his friends from filling an attorney friend's car completely full of duck feathers to tying a dead skunk to the underside chassis of another friend's pickup and many others.

But I also said Jay was a man of unwavering commitment and here is a story to prove it. Jay and his wife, Wilda, were married November 1947. This year was

their 65th wedding anniversary. The day after they were married, Wilda made breakfast and baked some bisquits for Jay. He said they were great and he ate all but one. He told me this story on their 50th golden wedding anniversary when Wilda was unwrapping a present on this celebrated milestone. When Wilda reached into the box she pulled out a gold bisquit. You see, Jay had made a commitment 50 years earlier to save one of those bisquits from their first breakfast. He sprayed it gold and put it in his safe deposit box, committing to give it to her on their 50th wedding anniversary. That speaks to the character of Jay Grunert, a true gentleman who will be missed.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.