

# HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Thursday, December 9, 2004

SUPPLEMENT TO THE RECORD-EAGLE

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Last in a three-part series

## The spirit of family-owned businesses

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BY CAROL SOUTH  
Special to the Record-Eagle

For small family-owned businesses, surviving means keeping customers happy, finding a niche, anticipating trends and just plain hard work.

Traver Teboe and his wife, Kathy, owners of Teboe Florist in Traverse City, supply a range of floral and greenery decorations during the holiday season. Companies, too, turn to the 58-year-old business for a range of party centerpieces plus corsages or gifts to employees or customers.

But it hasn't always been easy. One year Teboe Florist narrowly escaped losing every poinsettia in their 18,000 square feet of greenhouses, which are situated behind the store. Severe weather knocked out power and the family scrambled to provide the heat to keep the plants going.

Another year, a huge blizzard socked in the town and customers began calling for their plants and decorations.

"People didn't want that poinsettia or centerpiece the day after Christmas," said Traver Teboe. "So they called us expecting delivery."

Providing service in the breach is characteristic of small businesses, who operate more on customer loyalty and satisfaction than gross volume.

To Teboe, the more flower sellers out there — not only other florists but also grocery stores — the better for everyone.

"We provide the quality and if the grocery store is doing a good job that doesn't hurt us, it gets the message out there that flowers are important," he said. "Then when someone wants to send flowers to the hospital or have another delivery, they come to us because we provide that service."

Mike Deering has carved out a niche at Maxbauer Market, a specialty meat market on Union Street. With 70 percent of sales being upscale meats,



Maxbauer Market is a destination as well as a convenient stop-in-for-a-forgotten-gallon-of-milk store for nearby residents.

Tony and Albert Maxbauer started the store in 1913 and Deering is the third generation owner, having stepped into two uncles' shoes in 1979.

Deering noted that by Christmas, many of his customers are "turkeyed" out. Prime rib is a big seller, followed by hams and tenderloins and some fresh turkeys. New Year's special requests call for lots of seafood, such as shrimp and crab, as well as tenderloins.

Some repeat customers have ordered their meat at Maxbauer Market every year for decades. Deering has watched grandmothers train their daughters who are now teaching their daughters where to buy the best meat and how to prepare the traditional Christmas dishes.

"Usually what happens is a tradition is set and if you try to change that tradition, the children are the ones who throw the biggest fit," noted Deering. "They want it the way it's always been because it brings the warm fuzzies."

Left photo: Record-Eagle/Lara Neel  
Bottom photo courtesy of the Teboe family

Left, Mike Teboe checks a poinsettia at Teboe's Florist and Greenhouses in Traverse City. Bottom, from left: 40 years ago, the Teboe's team was floral designer Sandy Hanell, Teboe's founder Ralph Teboe, name not known and deliveryman Chuck Samulsen. Teboe's opened in 1946 and today is comprised of a flower shop and five greenhouses.



The market also offers two different seasoning blends, which they will either add to the meat or send home with the customer — another small service that distinguishes from larger stores. "The prime rib not only has the quality and the flavor and the taste but it is incredibly easy to prepare," said Deering of the Chairman's Reserve beef. "We have knowledgeable staff who can tell (buyers) how to cook them." Even in uncertain econom-

ic times, Deering said customers will "bite the bullet," pull out the credit card and purchase the components of their traditional holiday meal. "The other thing is if you screw up a lady's Christmas dinner, she will never forget," Deering said. "We have the best customers in Traverse City and it's our job to fulfill their needs, don't disappoint them." Pam Agee, owner of Holiday Traditions at the Grand Traverse Mall, lis-

tens to her customers year-round to anticipate trends and decide what Christmas ornaments and decorations to stock the next season. Starting her 12th season, Agee has a secret weapon in attracting customers: her daughter, Stacy Sheren. "She does all the trees and the villages and that gives them a real professional look," said Agee of her designer-manager daughter.

**PLEASE SEE PAGE 3**

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