

Family business is gone, but many memories remain

A house at 480 Plank Road and a service station at 1640 Empire Blvd. were demolished last week.

By AMY CAVALIER

Messenger Post Staff

Seated in his apartment in Penfield, Harry Brewer looks at photos of the demolition debris that was his livelihood for more than 60 years.

"It isn't pretty to look at," his wife, Vivian Brewer, said.

Harry Brewer operated a two-bay service station at 1640 Empire Boulevard since 1946. The station, and the house next door at 480 Plank Road which had been in the family since 1907, were both demolished last week to make way for a new convenience store and gas station.

Although he serviced cars, Brewer's sale of wheel covers since the 1970s is what gained him notoriety. When the wrecking ball took down the service station and house last week, it took with it many memories for Harry Brewer and his family members.

A Webster native, Harry Brewer took over the station from his uncle Percy Brewer in 1946. Previously, Harry Brewer had worked at Kodak and served in the Army Air Corps. When he took over, there were several different types of gasoline being sold. In 1946, all but Sunoco were discontinued.

In 1956, the old station was hauled away to make way for a new one. The first station, built in 1930, only had one outdoor bay. The structure is still being used as a building on Marion Road in Walworth.

"By that time it was the oldest station on the road," he said. "We needed something more modern to keep our business up."

Harry Brewer learned through experience how to do "lube jobs, tire repairs and a few mufflers." He also rented out UHaul vehicles for about 10 years in the 1950s and 1960s and sold candy and gum to the neighborhood kids.

"All that work kept me busy,"



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Harry Brewer was proprietor of Brewer's Service Station at 1640 Empire Blvd. for over 60 years. He was well known for selling hubcaps at the shop. Both the station and the Brewer Homestead, located at 480 Plank Road, were demolished last week to make way for a new convenience store and gas station.

he said. "I never needed to get any deeper than that."

"A lot of times, you were working seven days a week," said his wife Janice Brewer.

In 1978, Harry Brewer enlisted a helper to hang about 40 or 50 hubcaps he had collected in the window of one of the bays at the station.

"Boy, people started stopping in like you wouldn't believe," he said, "so I said this looks like it could be a good thing."

There was a demand for hubcaps and he knew how to fill it.

"We'd find them along the road, or people knowing we sold them, they'd bring them in and we'd buy them," he said.

Vivian Brewer recalls making trips on Sunday mornings before church, her hair still in curlers.

"He drove and I'd jump out and pick them up," Vivian Brewer said.

Harry Brewer knew where to look - near approaches to expressways, hubcaps and near corners. If a dealer went out of business, Harry Brewer was there looking for hubcaps.

"Anyway I could get them legally," he said.

He'd buy them for about \$2 a piece, fix them up, paint them

and resell them for \$5 to 8. Some of the more expensive and intricate wheel covers could bring in upwards of \$40 used, which was a steal when compared to the several hundreds of dollars some might go for new, said Harry Brewer.

The wheel covers were stacked 20 and 30 high in the shop, with up to 1,500 there at a time, but Harry Brewer knew just what his inventory contained. And if he didn't have what you needed, he'd take down your information and call you if he found what you were looking for.

Hubcaps became the station's biggest revenue generator.

Since the family homestead was right next door, many of Harry Brewer's family members have fond memories of the service station. Many of them still bring him home a

hubcap when they visit.

The grandchildren loved riding the lift up a foot high and then jumping off, recalls his daughter Janice Smith.

"We had a lot of good times," said Vivian Brewer.

In November 2003, after a fall at the station left Brewer with a broken hip, the family convinced him to give up the business. As for making a career out of doing repairs and selling hubcaps, Brewer said he never gave it much thought.

"In those days, you just kept going," he said.

Outside on the porch at the Brewer's new home, a pile of hubcaps fills one corner. He's got more in the garage.

"I brought a few of the good ones here in case someone calls, but it's not working well," he said. "Probably people need them, but don't know how to find me."