

June 4, 2005

Changes Not Always Bad

by
Tom Holbrook

Several years ago... don't remember the actual date... it was rumored that K-Mart was thinking of buying a large plot of land just South of the Interstate in Lewisburg, WV, and placing one of their stores on it. After soil testing, drilling, and other things people do before they buy a piece of land, K-Mart thought better of this particular plot and chose, instead, to renovate the empty Heck's store in Fairlea. They probably now wish they had taken the more prominent location close to I-64 since they are not experiencing the volume of sales they had hoped.

Several months later it was rumored that Walmart had expressed an interest in the same property and were seriously considering opening one of their Super Centers on the site. Immediately the letters to the editors of this and that other paper in Lewisburg began flooding the post office clamoring for space to warn the populace that the scourge of retail marketing was coming to transform our community into a economic wasteland. Even the mayor of Lewisburg, at that time, wrote a letter to Walmart pleading with them not to come because they would be destroying the local businesses and creating an atmosphere of hostility towards Walmart.

Being a resident of Lewisburg at the time and being the civic minded individual I am and have always been I, too, fired off a letter to Walmart. However, rather than encouraging them not to bring their road show to our town, I overwhelmingly thanked them for considering Lewisburg as a site for their store and gave them reasons why they should not retreat.

At that time one of the biggest complaints I would hear from average citizens living in Lewisburg was they had to drive an hour or hour and a half to Beckley, WV or Roanoke, VA to find affordable clothes for their children, or themselves. The local merchants, they said, have no competition and charge an arm and a leg for something that would cost half as much somewhere else. I also said folks in the area needed businesses that could provide jobs and add dollars to the local economy through taxes and ancillary services.

I told Walmart that there were those who had apprehensions about their presence in town, but they were in the minority. The majority, I said, looked forward to the coming of their store with great expectations and would welcome them not only with open arms but full cash registers as well. I'm not sure if my letter was the catalyst that swayed their decision to come but come they did and my predictions were true. Walmart had projected an amount of sales they expected to produce in their first year and from my private sources I'm told that they bettered that amount by more than half. It is rumored now that they are contemplating moving their Super Center a little further North of the Interstate and putting a Sam's Club at their current Walmart site.

I'm not sure of the number of people Walmart employs in the Lewisburg area, nor how many of them are women vs. men. I do know that there are many people who are now working who were once unemployed and to me that's a very good thing. I know of a few businesses who closed their doors when Walmart arrived, and no one likes to see any business close, but the doors that closed were re-opened shortly thereafter by a different business and the economy of Lewisburg seems to be booming.

Why must everyone always look on the gloomy side of change. It is inevitable and not always a bad thing. I believe we should be thankful for those people who are now working where once they weren't and I'm sure the local Chamber of Commerce could give us the positive spin that Walmart has meant to the whole area. Praise the Lord for the American way and free enterprise.

#