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Radel: Shoppers feel at home in their market

Pleasant Ridge community looks after its own



Cliff Radel

When a neighborhood starts to crumble, some communities throw in the towel. Or beg for handouts from City Hall. Not Pleasant Ridge.

Faced with the loss of its grocery store and a decline in its quality of life, the venerable Cincinnati neighborhood dug in its heels. And dug deeply into its pockets.

Thanks to the wherewithal of 10 investors, numerous residents and three churches with deep roots in Pleasant Ridge, a store that's nearly 100 years old received a new lease on life.

Cleaned up, spiffed up and remodeled - with no financial aid from taxpayers - the grocery became the Ridge Market. Styled after (but not affiliated with) historic Findlay Market, the Ridge Market threw its first birthday party Friday.

Always up for a party, the Summer Tour dropped by and found a success story in progress.

The Ridge Market stands as a tribute to civic pride. It shows how a community gathering place can revitalize a neighborhood. This market house and the vendors doing business under its antique pressed-tin ceiling could serve as a model for reviving other well-established Cincinnati neighborhoods struggling to maintain their identity and their pride.

"The Ridge Market is of the neighborhood and for the



Diane Rosenberg, from Hyde Park, greets her friend David Fischer, from Amberely Village, and his son Zach, 8 while shopping at Madison's at the Ridge on Friday afternoon at the Ridge Market.

(Leigh Patton photo)

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neighborhood," said Eric Bertelsen.

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He owns the Wild Bird's Nest, one of 11 shops in the market of butchers, bakers, caterers, wine and produce merchants, restaurateurs, fishmongers, florists and juice makers.

Bertelsen walks to work. Three blocks and eight minutes after leaving home, he's behind the counter selling bird seed and feeders.

Walking is a valued pastime in Pleasant Ridge. It helps account for the market's success, said Bryan Madison, owner of Madison's at Ridge Market and the building's resident greengrocer.

"Young people walk in with their babies in strollers," he said, weighing a melon for a customer with two children in tow. "Couples, older and younger, also walk in."

Walkers on Pleasant Ridge's Montgomery Road main drag are "a sign of a healthy neighborhood," Madison added. He contrasted this community's foot traffic with what he sees on Hamilton Avenue near his home in College Hill.

"There," he said, "a certain element discourages walk-in trade among what stores are still open."

In Pleasant Ridge, people feel encouraged to pad along the sidewalk. Walkers have many destinations among the neighborhood's shops complementing the Ridge Market.

James and Katrina Kanary walked into the market to shop for dinner fixings and to have lunch. They just moved to town from Memphis.

"Been here all of two days and a week," said James, an employee in the world of computers.

Out of Cincinnati's 52 neighborhoods, they chose Pleasant Ridge. Katrina, a first-year law student at the University of Cincinnati, explained why.

"We wanted a place where there's a strong attachment to the neighborhood. People in Pleasant Ridge are proud to say where they live. The business district has plenty of potential, especially with this great market that people want to support."

Ida Blanche Suskind has supported the Ridge Market since Day 1. And she lives in Hyde Park.

She could buy her groceries at a newly expanded superstore in her neighborhood. But she prefers to put a cooler in her car for her purchases, grab a friend for company and head to the Ridge Market for food and fun.

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"The ambiance here is so neat," Suskind said after lunching with her pal Paula Troup and giving a hug to another friend, Bobbie Reckseit, a first-time Ridge Market visitor.

"This market is so homey," Suskind added. "Makes you feel like an individual. Like you used to feel when you went shopping.

"The food and the service are outstanding. You can talk with these merchants like they're your friends. They make you feel welcome. They make you want to come back."

The friendly service and the desire for repeat business stem from everyone's having a stake in the market's success. The shop owners stock the shelves and run the cash registers. Their fortunes are tied up in the market. No one is footing the bill for them.

The Ridge Market did not ask the city to build a \$15 million garage. The market's merchants did not threaten to leave town if City Hall did not fork over \$52 million in grants and tax credits.

Instead, the vendors in the Ridge Market got down to business. They went about serving the neighborhood, giving the people what they want and making them feel proud of where they live.

Five facts about Pleasant Ridge

Population: 8,872

Origin of name: Local lore attributes its source to the Pleasant Ridge Cemetery. Established in the 1790s, the cemetery got its name after a settler sought a peaceful final resting place for his wife and child. A neighbor suggested a nearby "pleasant ridge," thus naming a cemetery and a neighborhood.

Original name: Cross Roads

Public dollars devoted to Ridge Market: \$0

Ridge Market: 6142 Montgomery Road; 924-1600; 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday; www.ridgemarket.com.

Cliff Radel, a Cincinnati native, writes about the people, places and traditions defining his hometown. E-mail cradel@enquirer.com.

What defines summer in your neighborhood? Every Monday, a neighborhood's slice of summer will be served in Metro. Send suggestions to: Cliff Radel's Summer Tour, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 312 Elm St., Cincinnati 45202; fax (513) 768-8340; e-mail cradel@enquirer.com.

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