

## **BENCH PAYS TRIBUTE TO 'GOOD NEIGHBOR' - Fred Kletke known for devotion to Old Newsboys, helping others**

In the lobby of Goodrich's Shop-Rite, just about 10 paces from where **Fred Kletke** used to happily hawk newspapers for charity each year, stands a sturdy new memorial bearing his name.

The wood-and-metal bench has a look of dependability and durability — as if it will have little trouble fulfilling for many years its duty of providing support to any passers-by who require a break. In other words, it serves as a fitting tribute to a man remembered for his consistent devotion to meeting the needs of others.

"I guess it's just our way of saying thanks — thank you for being such a good neighbor and thank you for being such a good friend," said Jim DeWitt, president of East Lansing's Red Cedar Community Association, during a Tuesday morning bench dedication at the neighborhood supermarket.

Contributions flowed in quickly to the neighborhood association to pay for the bench following the loss of one of its most recognizable citizens on Dec. 6. Kletke, 94, had lovingly been known as the "mayor of the flowerpot" because of his unofficial status as caretaker to those who lived in the close-knit neighborhood with street names like Marigold, Lilac and Daisy.

### **Giving back**

Kletke's neighbors also had no trouble deciding to place the bench at Goodrich's, the store where he famously dressed as Santa each year and sold Lansing Spooof Journals for the Old Newsboys charity.

Kletke and his brother, Emil— another notable local Santa — both were known for their longtime devotion to the Old Newsboys effort, taking part in gathering donations for the shoes-for-needy-kids charity for well more than 50 years.

But Goodrich's was far more than a place for **Fred Kletke** to gather donations one day a year. The store was part of his community and had become a second home to him following his retirement from the Michigan State University Salvage Department in 1978.

"He had a whole other family here at Goodrich's," said his son, Fritz, 69, of Lansing.

### **Surrounded by 'family'**

And, while Fritz is Kletke's only living child, Kletke had a wealth of other adopted kin. In addition to his family of neighbors and his family at Goodrich's, he had a family of MSU football rooters at Spartan Stadium, where he served as usher from 1938 to 2003.

Those who attended the dedication ceremony were pleased to see the bench near the store's flower section, since the marigolds Kletke grew in his yard were an important part of his connection to people. He would hand his beloved flowers freely to his neighbors each year.

And, while the bench is a fitting memorial to Kletke in so many ways, those who gathered around it Tuesday agreed no one could have kept him sitting in it for long.

"I remember when I came home and he'd blown all my leaves to the curb, and he was probably 88," said Joanne Russell, the neighborhood association vice president. "He had more energy than the teenage kids in the neighborhood."

### **Mark Mayes**

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