

## Features



### After 58 Years of Loving People

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After 58 Years of Loving People

*Written by*

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**Dexter, Missouri** - Cleo's Service Station, a landmark business in downtown Dexter, will be locking its doors for the final time this Saturday. The family business has enjoyed 58 great years of successful trade in Dexter, but at the youthful age of 80, Cleo Holder has decided that it is time to retire.

Many local residents will find a change in their normal routine of pulling in to get fuel, a needed camping part or those wonderful flowers during the spring and fall seasons.

The greatest loss will be the positive spirit that Cleo Holder personally delivered to your car window with a hardy "Hello ... " and call you by name. The immediate shine that the Cleo's Team would put on your windshield no matter how many bugs you had run through will also be missed.

Cleo's was a safe haven for those not so sharp in the skills of auto maintenance and auto repair. A customer of Cleo's could often stop by to see what Cleo or Tim thought about their auto troubles, and either get it fixed or get referred to another local business to do a more extensive repair.

Cleo's was a place where you could trust that your children could get their gas and maybe some small talk about what was going on in their lives. Considered a small item in our busy world but yet, a piece of yesterday that we transfer to a memory and

a story for your grandchildren.

Change is never easy  
for anyone, but the



Holder family has been able to preserve pieces of Americana that have been replaced with the efficiencies and speed at which we live today. We will indeed miss these small delicacies of business.

Cleo recounts the good memories of his years at this busy downtown corner. Most memorable to him was working with his two sons, Tim and Terry. "What more could you want than to go to work for your son everyday," stated Mr. Holder. "Of course both of my boys have worked here," commented Mr. Holder. "... and it's been a tremendous pleasure working with them and being here with Tim for the past 15 years."

Change has come upon the auto industry. The improvements and increased reliability of cars and trucks has created an effect in other industries; therefore, what is good in one area is not as good in others. "The auto service industry has just gone downhill," commented Cleo in a recent interview. "Cars are just many times better than they used to be. What would normally require a tune-up every 10,000 miles is now a 100,000 mile tune-up," he continued.

These efficiencies have caused many service stations of the past to disappear over time. You can only attribute the long standing success of Cleo's Service Station against these odds to the loyalty they earned from their customers for the service they provided. "I don't know," Cleo modestly stated. "We like people and people like us the best I can tell you."

But this was not Cleo Holder's first brush with progress. Cleo and his family were originally farmers in the area. After spending a year and a half in the Philippines and Okinawa in the Army, Cleo returned home to find the family farm being gathered up due to progress of the Dexter community. Their farm sat on the ground that the Dexter Public Schools now sits.



Losing a portion of that  
ground did not leave

enough for the family to continue farming. At the age of 22 years, Cleo came down to

visit with Red Francis, who had owned the service station 27 years. Red was known by many as a nice guy that sometimes was a little bit of a "joker". Often, Red would create entertaining visit to his service station, as a pistol arcade might occur behind what is now Rainey Mathis Funeral Home. "That's when I *"bought"* my first job and never left," Mr. Holder proudly explained.

The sales representative at that time promised Cleo to build a new building if he was able to run a good business for one year. The year passed and the new building we all know as Cleo's was built.

"We have had many students work here over the years from the COE program at the School," remembered Cleo. "Some of them are successful businessmen here in town now, including Allen Walker of Walker Construction. We've really had some good ones."

When asked about his favorite memories, he simply noted "the people and relationships have been the most rewarding. Being a business owner has given Glenda and I a chance to travel so we've been able to visit every State in the Union and all Provinces in Canada." Cleo also noted that they've done all that by auto since his wife does not fly.

When you want to talk about stamina on the

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job, Cleo Holder is the candidate of the year for the best at being on the job. In 58 years of owning the business, he only missed one half-day of work to have a surgical procedure. "They removed my thyroid that morning and I came in that afternoon," noted Mr. Holder. "That's not too bad for 80 years old. When I was young, *I used to think the old peoples were tough and now I are one.*"

Cleo was proud to see that the tradition will continue to the next generation as both Tim and Terry Holder will be the new owners of Gregory's Creations beginning January 1st, 2013. After a short period of time, both brothers will begin to work through the holiday season with the current owner, Greg Banken, to ensure a smooth transition with the business.

The actual closing of Cleo's Service Station has been moved up a few weeks as they have sold the majority of their inventory in the past weeks. "It's gonna seem strange to

not be coming to this place." commented Cleo.

Many have grown accustomed to the many youth activities of the First Christian Church that are held at Cleo's throughout the year. Tim Holder was quick to make sure everyone would still find those traditions going forward at the new location at Gregory's.

"We will certainly setup during the Stoddard County Parade and make available our hot dogs," added Tim. "You can count on us remaining involved in the community more and more."

This article: [After 58 Years of Loving People](https://showmetimes.com) was first published on <https://showmetimes.com>.

Written by Staff Writer

Date: September 24th 2012



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