

## Pace of Business in Wysox Township Suits Victor Franklin



**Victor Franklin (above) has run Franklins Appliance Sales & Services from the same store at 1998 Golden Mile Road since 1993.**

Appliance dealership owner Victor Franklin fondly remembers a quieter Wysox when “We knew everybody.”

“It was just like the Andy Griffith Show,” he recalls. “I could ride my bike everywhere.” Victor remembers pedaling his bicycle through the village when there were more active farms on the outskirts and just as many residences along Route 6 as there were businesses.

Even then, however, the township was evolving as the opening of the Masonite plant, as well as GTE Sylvania and DuPont in Towanda brought an influx of new people to the area. In more recent years, the natural gas industry has brought more traffic to the village and hastened the commercialization of the Golden Mile.

Victor is unfazed, explaining that he has usually been comfortable with the pace of his business in light of alternately surging and diminishing demands for his products and services. For example, sales of parts for the appliances he sells have dropped off in recent years because more people are purchasing the parts online.

“The changes have been gradual,” Victor says of both Wysox and business at Franklins Appliance Sales & Service, which has had as many as four employees and currently has none. That's OK, he maintains. “I'm at a happy spot. I can't do things that I could do when I was 20 years old.”

When he was 20, Victor was working at Masonite, after which he worked at Claverack for a year. He took plumbing and electrical courses at Towanda VoTech (now the Northern Tier Career Center) and even taught classes there before pursuing a degree and certification in refrigeration and air conditioning at Williamsport Area Community College (now Penn Tech).

Upon graduation from WACC, Victor was immediately offered a good job in Orwigsburg. "Two days later, my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer," Victor relates. He made up his mind quickly to remain in Wysox and help to look after his parents.

Victor was the youngest of three children born to Ben Franklin Jr. and Donna (Jones) of Wysox Township. His sisters are Sandra, now living in Pottstown, and Judy in Massachusetts. The family also had a dairy farm in Standing Stone Township that had belonged to his grandfather, Ben Franklin Sr. since 1930. Victor continues to grow corn and hay there.

The Franklin lineage literally goes back to Philadelphia and none other than founding father Benjamin Franklin. The Franklins have been in the area for centuries, but Victor is unsure exactly how long. His great-great-grandfather John owned a stone quarry in Sheshequin Township. The area is now known as Quarry Glen.

According to Victor, his grandmother Pauline (Sherman) Franklin was born in Rummerfield and was a descendant of cotton gin inventor Eli Whitney. His maternal grandmother was Elizabeth Jones. Her sister Muriel married John Jennings and together they ran Quick & Jennings grocery store, which was situated on the north side of Route 6, west of the Wysox Motel and the current magisterial district office. In addition to Ben Jr., Pauline gave birth to Ellen, Vivian, Dean, and Kay Franklin.

Victor's mother, Donna, was from Shinglehouse in Potter County. Victor and his sisters attended Wysox Elementary School and eventually Towanda Area High School, from which Victor graduated in 1978. He immediately went to work at the Rynveld Wreath Company in New Albany.

Donna worked as a school teacher at the Wysox, Mulberry Street, and Third Ward schools in the Towanda School District. Ben Jr. retired from Penelec. Donna passed away in 1989, and Ben died in 2003.

When Donna grew ill, Victor took a job at Wrisley & Kerrick, an appliance store in Monroeton. "They were a big GE dealer in the area," he noted. "They had three stores at the time."

He took to the business quickly, moving from sales and in-shop repair to over the road service work. By 1992, he was ready to start his own business and leased a modest cement block structure near the intersection of Routes 6 and 187, next to a cornerstone building that has been home to numerous businesses, including Lundy Office Supply in the 1970s and, currently, Timothy B. Franklin Insurance. (Victor's cousin Tim owns the properties and operates an insurance business on the first floor with his family.)

Victor's first challenge was getting the start-up loan that he needed to invest in new merchandise. He was disappointed to learn that his good personal credit could not be used as collateral. He looked to the Northern Tier Planning & Development Commission and the Small Business Administration to help him bring his dream to fruition. After nearly a year of filing applications and "jumping through hoops," Franklins Appliance opened in August 1993.

"I was busy right from the start," Victor recalls, noting that his customer base grew quickly. "I knew the area, and people knew me."

Victor has sold GE and Hotpoint appliances since he opened, and briefly sold Jenn Air/Magic Chef appliances. He prefers to service the products that he sells. "I take care of my customers, and they take care of me," Victor remarks. "To the big box stores, you're a nobody."

Big box stores have been a challenge to many business owners along the Golden Mile, as

have been downturns in the economy and the 2011 flood. While his shop was spared during that great deluge, he lost new merchandise that was in a storage facility on the north side of Route 6 that was inundated.

During the winter of 1993-94, businesses along the strip suffered through a brutally snowy winter, when it seemed that another foot of snow fell every Wednesday. "You couldn't even see Route 6 from here," Victor gestured through the window and across the parking lot from inside his store where snow that season was piled more than six feet high. "That was a slow time for everybody."

One more adventure, a framed newspaper article about which hangs on the wall behind Victor's desk, was the crashing through the front of the store in March 2007 of a truck tractor hauling an oil delivery truck. The driver for Williams Oil Company had failed to negotiate the right turn from Route 187 onto Route 6 in heavy fog and jackknifed the two vehicles into the building after sheering off a utility pole at the front.

Victor admitted to newspaper reporter Wes Skillings that he was relieved and calmed to see that the vehicles belonged to Williams, as he knew the owner personally. One of his initial fears, Victor told Skillings was that he would be dealing with an out-of-state company. Instead, company owner Randy Williams and a manager were on the scene within minutes, and a crew of about 30 was there by afternoon to cleanup and rebuild.

"It was an unfortunate situation," Victor still recalls. "But we worked through it like two gentlemen. Everything was taken care of."

In fact, Victor maintains that the best part about doing business in Wysox Township is knowing who he can trust. "It's still a small enough area for that," he stated.

Victor admits that he does not have as many customers as he once did, in part due to the aging of the general population. "A lot of the older folks are gone," he said. Victor shares the concerns of his fellow Route 6 business owners that younger generations have been lured to the big box stores with little concern about personalized customer service until they need it and it isn't there.

Nonetheless, Victor says of his career in appliance sales and service, "It has flowed well for me. It's winding down for me at a good pace. My goal right now is to take care of my core customers."



An account published in the Daily Review about the grand opening of Franklins Appliance Sales & Service in 1993.



Victor Franklin is shown standing in an opening in the front of his store in this Rocket-Courier account of a truck crashing into the building in 2007.