



**By Carolyn Lee**

***The Imperial Republican***

It's been 50 years since Ansel Hill began working in the grocery business in Imperial. It's been 30 years since he became owner of Hill's Family Foods. And, there have been a lot of changes along the way.

Ansel began working for what was then Jack and Jill in 1959, at its present location at 131 E. 5th Street.

Before his time, feed was sold in the east end of the building.

When he began working, the store had a custom slaughterhouse at a nearby location, and the meat was then moved to the store for sale. The present office was then a freezer for the meat.

Ansel and Joyce bought the store in 1979 from Bill Mollring. Other partners in the venture were Larry Sargent and Bud and Uota Skeels, whom they bought out in 2000.

Also in 1979, Joyce began doing the bookwork for the store.

The year 2001 was momentous for the return of son, Dirk, and wife, Rhonda, to the store. In addition, the name was changed to Hill's Family Foods in November of that year.

The store has been remodeled many times, both before and after the Hills purchased it. Changes include moving the front door from the north to the east and expanding the store on the east end into what had been storage.

Changes have met the requirements of the times, Ansel said. When he started in the business, the emphasis was more on meat processing. He said Hills still takes special orders on cuts of meat, and prides itself on the selection offered.

The store used to sell eggs and cream from local producers. Now, it sells only Affiliated Foods products and the Shurfine brand. However, Ansel said he sometimes sells locally-grown corn in the summer.

Bread and chips come from companies other than the Affiliated Foods warehouse.

"We have a tremendous variety now compared to what it had been," he said of what he sells. "Usually in those days the wife stayed home and did the cooking. As women headed to work, the demand for prepared foods went up."

Hill's offers daily lunch specials, rents out Rug Doctor machines, makes home deliveries on Fridays, prepares fruit baskets and meat/cheese and vegetable trays, and emphasizes special orders of meat cuts.

Ansel said he enjoys being around people at the store the most. Joyce said she likes to work with the public. "Everyone has a different story, and everyone is so friendly."

The Hills were honored last Friday when Dirk invited back a number of their former supervisors, those people who used to call on them. "It was nice to see them," Ansel remarked.

Specials during the week to mark their 30 years of service included a shopping spree, special ice cream treats, a steak special, a produce sale and lunch on the lot.

One lady in town was heard stating that she'd been in most days for the ice cream specials.