

# REDEKOPP REMEMBERS



Rendering of Redekopp's first business venture. Artist unknown. See story on page 17.

April 1 1986

by Wanda McConnell

Spring 1938: 24 year-old Henry Redekopp takes over the Roadside Store, selling two loaves of bread for 11 cents and a pound of hamburger for 15 cents to the market gardeners who live and work around him.

Spring 1986: Redekopp, now 72, climbs into the cab of a giant demolition machine and works the gears that will take the first huge bite out of the walls of the buildings he built over a 41-year span — and East Kildonan says goodbye to a familiar landmark in the community.

Redekopp Lumber and Supply — as it was known from the time Henry Redekopp switched in 1951 from groceries to "everything for the house and home", and Polet Lumber, as it was known from 1979 when Redekopp sold his business to Burt Polet, is currently being demolished to make way for Kildonan Village.

The \$4.5 million shopping mall project, a joint development of Donald S. Ellice and Curtis E. Bars, will include office space and at least 16 retail shops, as well as a drive-through restaurant. It's scheduled to open in late 1986.

The four-acre site at Henderson Highway and Devon

market gardeners who surrounded him. At that time a person looking north of his store would see only prairie. Just south of the store was a large private estate, now the site of the Curtis Hotel.

But by 1951, the scenery was changing. Winnipeg was growing by leaps and bounds and the "suburbs" now stretched towards and beyond his grocery store. A construction boom was happening, and Redekopp, who already sold some hardware in his store, decided to launch a new business. He opened Redekopp Lumber and Supply and for the next 28 years, built up the lumber business.

The company's motto was "everything for the house and home", and for a while Redekopp also operated his old grocery store. "We used to say it was the only lumber yard in town could sell you the home and the groceries too," he says chuckling.

A devout Christian, Re-

dekopp's success lay as much in his devotion to his faith and his customers, as in the quality materials he sold.

"I wasn't there just to make money. I was there to serve the community," he says proudly.

And he did serve it, staying open late when he knew a customer couldn't get there during the day, and going out of the way to meet the needs of the market.

"I made a lot of good friends," he says looking back.

Redekopp had bought the grocery store for \$330, lock, stock and barrel back in 1938. He had one stock boy he paid \$3 a week. When he sold his business in 1979, he had over 100 employees and a company worth \$4 million.

By that time he was reaching retirement age, and along with his four sons and two daughters, and wife Sigrid, all of whom had helped build up his business,

he decided it "was" time to move on. He is still actively involved with his sons in two or three business interests.

"God was gracious to me. He blessed me with health, a beautiful family, the right friends and opportunities and a wonderful country."

Seeing the buildings come down, he says, "There's a time for everything to die...and now is the time for rebirth. I will be watching with interest."



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The four-acre site at Henderson Highway and Devon Avenue will have come a long way from the Roadside Store Redekopp operated decades before. Indeed the mall is perhaps a dream fulfilled, as Redekopp remembers soon after opening, one of his customers, "a little old lady by the name of Mrs. Spittlehouse", rushing into his store one morning to tell him she had a dream that his modest little shop would someday be a department store.

Redekopp had emigrated from Russia with his parents and four brothers 13 years earlier. Memories of the Russian Revolution, and the death and starvation were still vivid in the young grocer's mind as he sold milk, and flour, and even chicken feed to his customers — the

site of the Ellice Hotel. But by 1951, the scenery was changing. Winnipeg was growing by leaps and bounds and the "suburbs" now stretched towards and beyond his grocery store. A construction boom was happening, and Redekopp, who already sold some hardware in his store, decided to launch a new business. He opened Redekopp Lumber and Supply and for the next 28 years, built up the lumber business.

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Redekopp on demolition day.

photo by Wanda McConnell

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