



OLESON'S A COMMUNITY RETAILER

written by: Tricia Phelps

Many people in northwest Lower Michigan hold the Oleson family name in high-regard. For some, it's about the gifts the Oleson Family Foundation makes to local organizations; for others, it's the region's five Oleson's Food Stores. But either way, it's clear that the Oleson family cares deeply about strengthening our community.

Gerald and Frances Oleson opened a small grocery store on Front Street in Traverse City in June 1926, and lived in the apartment directly above it. With community support the business grew into a larger location just down the street and later expanded to Petoskey, Charlevoix, and Manistee, with the involvement of their sons. Thirty-six years after opening their first location, in 1962, the couple founded the Oleson Family Foundation with the goal of continually performing good works in northwest Lower Michigan.

Today, Gerald and Frances' grandchildren and great-grandchildren continue to manage the operation of Oleson's Food Stores. And their family's founding legacy is still deeply rooted in the business.

"I take incredible pride in our name and guard its reputation to the fullest extent," said co-owner Brad Oleson "My family history brought us to where we are. I take a lot of pride in that, and I back it up 100 percent."

The Oleson's relationship with the local community is an important way they differentiate themselves from their larger competitors. As a regional grocer, they've

built important one-on-one connections with both their customers and local food producers.

"We try to bring in as much local as we can," said Oleson, "and to bring in niche items or unique products people are asking for."

With local products in their stores, the Olesons use Taste the Local Difference® branding to differentiate local food on the shelves and in the produce coolers. Fresh, local produce and proteins are an Oleson's specialty and the company has become well-known for ensuring these items are regularly available.

Larger national retailers may sometimes be able to offer lower prices, but people are realizing that price isn't always the most important factor in food purchasing decisions. Educated consumers are comparing price with quality and community—when a product is cheaper, but the money spent on it leaves the local community, they're considering the real cost of that product instead.

Businesses owned and operated by local people often contribute much more to the vibrancy and well-being of the community as a whole. Spending your dollars at local stores with local products is a crucial way to show your support.

"We give our customers the service and the selection they're looking for," said Oleson "And we believe in our people. Our employees are the ones that have built this company and without them we would not be here."

