

BUSINESS

Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post

A big family of small stores

Local convenience store chain is giving back after 50 years of business

By Brent Burgess
Standard-Radio Post Editor

Any drive around Fredericksburg and the surrounding Hill Country, and one will likely pass a familiar orange sign saying Mini Mart. These little gas station and convenience stores are reliable landmarks in the area and are now celebrating 50 years of business.

As a celebration for 50 years of success, the owners, Sylvia Fritz Dobbs and her brother, David Fritz, are commemorating and fundraising for local volunteer firemen in the counties they serve.

Sylvia and David have a long history in Gillespie County.

“Both sides of our parents are really all from Gillespie County and Harper and Fredericksburg,” Sylvia said. “Our roots are Gillespie County. Our dad went to St. Mary’s and my mom grew up in Harper.”

Sylvia’s father was Junior Fritz, who bought Fritz Grocery in 1966 and worked alongside Sylvia’s mother, Anne.

“As the story goes, they prospered there,” Sylvia said. “They had this meat market and cut meat. He had fresh produce and this cute little market type store.”

Creating convenience

Junior Fritz was a volunteer fireman. Sylvia recalls being a child and her father receiving phone calls for emergency service.

“Before when he was (a volunteer fireman) there weren’t cell phones,” Sylvia recalled. “So, they could connect into your house phone, your landline, but it had a different ring. So, when there was a fire that ring would be something serious. So, we’d all jump, and he would get going and he’d be out the door.”

While serving his community as a grocer and a volunteer fireman, Junior



Sylvia Fritz Dobbs owns 18 Mini Mart convenience stores in the Texas Hill Country with her brother, David Fritz. This year the siblings celebrate 50 years of business by raising funds and supporting local volunteer fire departments in the communities they serve. — Standard-Radio Post/Brent Burgess

Fritz had a larger vision.

“Then in the late 1960s and early ’70s, convenience stores were kind of a new concept,” said Sylvia. “They weren’t really in Texas; they were just starting. He dreamed of owning a chain of convenience stores.”

The family purchased the first convenience store in 1973. That store is located at 1001 Sydney Baker South in Kerrville and is still there today. Soon after, the family purchased a store in Bandera, and then built another location in Kerrville.

“By the time we hit 1980, there were eight, almost 10 stores,” Sylvia said. “We got the first one in Fredericksburg in 1984. Fredericksburg, even back then was a little more expensive.”

Sylvia spoke proudly of her parents’ investment in the stores, their pursuit of a dream and their approach to customer service.

“I grew up working in the stores and in the grocery store,” Sylvia said. “I went

to UT Austin with a business degree and then came back and started getting involved. I took over leadership in 1994. In 2013, my brother and I bought the business from our dad and mom.

“We’re rooted in hospitality since 1973, because my dad would go around to visit the stores,” Sylvia recalled. “He had an ice chest on the back of his truck, and he loved to talk and meet people. So, they would sit on the back of the truck and pop a cold one. They would love to see him.”

While the family is no longer pulling up in pickup trucks with a cooler full of beer, the Fritz family is keeping the charitable spirit of customer service alive as they celebrate 50 years of business.

Fundraising for firefighters

Because Junior Fritz was a volunteer firefighter, and the Fritz family has a long tradition of staying involved in helping volunteer departments, honoring



Each Mini Mart store is displaying signs and photographs of volunteer firemen who serve in that county or community.

firefighters is as much in Sylvia and David’s blood as the grocery business.

“When he started becoming more successful with the stores, the main thing he would give money, when he had extra money, was to volunteer firemen,” Sylvia said.

“We would go to these fish fries. He loved to go to the volunteer firemen all around, their fish fries or their barbecues. He knew the importance of what they did for our community.”

In celebration of 50 years in business, the Fritz family is decorating their stores with photographs of local volunteer firefighters from those counties on display.

In addition to the displays, they are raising funds to support those local volunteer fire departments. Many of the donations are being collected through the business website, which will be dispersed among several departments. However, donations made in the stores will go directly to the local volunteer fire department in that community.

A large family

These days, the Fritz family Mini Marts employ almost 200 workers at 18 different stores. Sylvia said the business has seen its share of ups and downs but expressed gratitude for their workers who have hung with them, even if for a short while.

“We have some very loyal devoted employees,” Sylvia said. “We understand that for some it may be a career

and for some it may just be passing through on their way to a career.”

Like so many businesses, the Fritzes struggled during COVID-19 related shutdowns. The Mini Marts qualified as an essential business, so the stores stayed open, but Sylvia saw several of her employees get sick and struggled to keep the staffing needs met.

“For us, 2020 was the biggest hurdle,” said Sylvia. “But we had started a couple of years before that having different leadership meetings and we did our strategic planning. So, we were already working with our business coach. The leadership team was ready when an emergency happened.”

Sylvia described how she and David spent a lot of time in the stores filling staffing needs. They also were among the first local businesses to put up health shields at the registers.

The campaign to raise funds for local fire departments is a way that the Fritz family is expressing gratitude to their community for the 50-year success. In addition to receiving donations, the stores are also planning some live events and cookouts.

“Our parents worked side by side and taught my brother and I how to care for people,” Sylvia said. “So, really this is fulfilling his dream. I’m fulfilling Junior Fritz’s dream.”

For information about the Mini-Mart stores, to make donations, or to view anniversary events, go to the website at <https://mini-mart.com>.

MY 2
CENTS

Penny McBride



Working to get a home within reach

One of my earliest memories is of my mother awakening me on a cold, dark winter morning in our little wooden house on East Austin Street. She lifted me out of bed and wrapped me up in my pink housecoat and slippers before having me stand on the grate of the floor furnace while she got the family’s breakfast together.

I loved standing there. The warm air from the grate filled my little housecoat to keep me cozy and allowed me to keep an eye on everything else happening.

Each day we crossed a shared driveway to the backdoor of our grandmother’s house, where we would stay while our parents both went to work. By the time I was four, my parents saved enough money to build a larger house, just on the edge of town, for about \$25,000. We moved in on Valentine’s Day with a light layer of snow blanketing the ground.

My parents turned our former home, which had been a gift from my maternal grandparents, into a long-term rental, using that income to help pay their mortgage. It was their home for the rest of their lives.

Following a few years as a renter, I bought my first home for about \$45,000 (at a time our household income was less than \$25,000), thanks to creative financing.

Much of the down payment was borrowed from my grandmother, with below-market interest. The rest was owner financed at the prevailing rate. That home was sold years later at a capital gain which was invested into another home. The process continued several times over 20 years and I was able to buy the fourth house I lived in as an adult for cash.

My parents were able to work and raise a family in my mother’s hometown because someone helped them. I have been able to have a life in my hometown because someone helped me. My parents both worked hard. I worked more than one job until my mid-40s. But we still had help.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median family income in Fredericksburg is \$43,670, but the average home price within the city limits was \$638,695 at the end of March.

Even the loving support of family and a flexible home-seller would not be enough for me to return home from college and start a life in

MCBRIDE ▶ A7

Food handlers’ course slated May 19 by Extension office

A food handlers’ course, accredited by the Texas Department of State Health Services, will be offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

“Food Safety: It’s In Your Hands” is being brought to the area by Texas AgriLife Extension, Gillespie County.

The class will be offered from 2-4 p.m. Friday, May 19 at the Golden Hub Community Center, 1009 N. Lincoln St.

To register for the course, call the Extension office at 830-997-3452. The cost is \$20 per person.

This two-hour course is required for all food service employees in Gillespie County to help promote the service of safe food.

The course is a basic overview of food safety practices that are necessary to ensure that safe food is served at local establishments. Practices discussed include good personal hygiene,

cross contamination, and time and temperature abuse.

There is also an online course to participate in, and it is available in English or Spanish.

The website for the course is <http://foodsafetyonline.tamu.edu>.

The online course will also meet the requirement for Gillespie County retail food establishments.

Change happens. But awareness alone won’t solve the inevitable. That calls for serious preparation. We will be there for each step.

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