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# Can't find it? Look back in time

By Penny Carnathan

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When Shell's Feed and Seed Store opened in 1961, it was out in the country at the corner of Busch Boulevard and Nebraska Avenue in Tampa. Well, no, not exactly. "This actually was not part of the city of Tampa," says Greg Shell, son of founders Charles and Betty. "Busch Boulevard was actually Temple Terrace Highway, and I don't know if it was even paved." We sold feed, hardware, saddles - even hats and boots and belts. "Greg doesn't remember all that; he wasn't born till a decade later. The store and warehouse moved a couple of blocks north in the mid-'60s, after the little highway became the big boulevard. The name changed to Shell's Feed & Garden Supply, and the inventory evolved some, but the store didn't. Not really. Forget the neighboring pawn shop and the car repair business a couple of doors down. Here, future egg-laying Rhode Island Red chicks go for \$2.75 each, and a bale of hay, great mulch for vegetable beds, is \$7. Hand-bagged, hard-to-find Just Right turnip seeds are \$6.50 a half-ounce (most other seeds are a lot less). Poultry manure, said to be garden gold, is \$15.95 for 50 pounds. Fish emulsion, tobacco dust, onion sets - it's all here. Shell's, at 9513 N. Nebraska Ave., is now surrounded by city, just a couple of minutes from the Busch exit on Interstate 275. It's still the old-fashioned, down-home shop Greg's parents started - they drop in now and again - and it still sells stuff you can't get in the city. Heck, some of it you can't find in the country. Regular customers hail from rural communities as far away as Brooksville. Dennis Newby drives 17 miles from Seffner, where chicken manure should be as thick as orange trees. He has 5 acres of grapes and a vegetable garden, and he's been a customer since Greg was about 7 years old. "It's a pretty good drive, but I don't mind," he says. "The people take time with you. I like that. They're knowledgeable about what they sell." He likes the free copies of Grier's Almanac, too. Greg and store manager John Axelson take great pride in their customer service. And low prices. And stocking supplies that gardeners have a hard time finding locally. The trick is talking to - and listening to - customers, says Greg, a gardener himself. It also helps that the shop is a member of the Tampa Rose Society. Which likely explains the presence of elusive Mills Magic Rose Mix fertilizer. During a time when many

businesses are suffering, Greg says Shell's is holding its own."My dad always said, a business like this, people don't like change. We've been able to tweak things, make the changes people do like. But you can't get too far away from the basics."My dad was always proud of that."Penny Carnathan