

VALLEY Advocate

AUG. 28, 1989

FOOD



Left to right: Jim Schott, Ralph Webber, Barry Kittredge, Sid Kittredge, with kitchen stools. Not present: George Kittredge.

Wine Glasses, Radish Peelers, And Miles of Tablecloth

Springfield's Kittredge Equipment Company combines service and services

Kittredge Equipment Company is, as one local restaurateur describes it, "cooking heaven." It isn't a surprising comment, if you happen to know Kittredge's. The reputation of this 90,000-square-foot warehouse/showroom for high-quality low cost goods is clearly established—in food circles.

You've seen it as you head north on I-91 in Springfield, the large white building with blue lettering on Columbus Avenue just alongside the highway. It's a Springfield landmark, family-owned and -run, and it's been the foremost supplier to area hotels, schools and restaurants for the better part of 60 years. According to co-owner Ralph Webber, Kittredge's is also the largest distributor of food service products in western New England.

And you don't need an uncle in the business to buy there: It's open for retail business, too. You can buy in bulk, or in singles.

The \$2 million plus inventory is a bonanza of supplies that range from gigantic meat slicers to dishes, glasses, utensils and general kitchen paraphernalia. Toothpicks, shotglasses and teapots; garlic presses, pancake batter dispensers and skewers; scales and crockery; and more.

Webber, who co-owns the company with his brothers Sidney, Barry and George Kittredge, says the firm's philosophy is a simple and yes, old-fashioned one. Certainly not a new concept, Kittredge's believes in providing quality merchandise at discounted prices, made available by way of low overhead and volume buying.

"When we buy glassware for example," says Barry Kittredge, "we are talking about a purchase of 25,000 cases of glassware. That's something that most places wouldn't even begin to do."

If all of this sounds like a Crazy Eddie hype or bargain basement schlock, think again. It's not. The stock here is replete with the most rugged and durable brand-names in the business, from here to the Bowery and beyond. Names like Libby glass, Hobart, Bevarage-Air, and Wearever. And it's all neatly arranged and well-marked.

Just what kind of goodies are there? The inventory of this light and airy story reads like a Dr. Seuss primer or a Julia Child Christmas list: Rows of slicers and dicers, choppers and graters, mixers and beaters, peelers and parers. Not

to mention whisks and shakers. On the wholesale side, there's everything you need to get started in a culinary business, or to keep going in one, whether you're a fancy French eatery looking for fluted ramekins or a street vendor looking for a hot dog machine.

And if you need five hot dog machines or 45 ramekins, their motto is to have as much in stock at all times as humanly possible. What this means, says Barry Kittredge, is that "we are one of the few places that you can call and tell us you want to open in two weeks as a restaurant—we have the ability to put you on-line and get you started in that time frame."

Items are priced per unit, but they're cheaper by the dozen or per case. For example, full-sized sheet pans are available at \$10.95 each or \$115 per dozen, a savings of over \$15.

Certainly nominated for interesting item of the week category would have to be the six-hole snail plates and the professional pepper grinder. In case you're wondering what the difference between a professional and non-professional grinder is, the folks at Kittredge's can tell you. According to them, the professional version is for people who take their pepper grinding very seriously. There are times when even a sprinkling can be too much, and while the professional model looks just like any other table type, they say "it's all in wrist." The pro model provides greater control.

It still seems to be a matter of preference concerning whether it's better to go with a six-hole versus say a five-hole snail plate, but if discussions such as this one hold your interest, this is the place for you.

If you're looking for a cooking thermometer, the question here isn't, "Do you carry them?" but "What kind do I want?" They stock the following thermometers: freezer, oven, grill, roasting, pizza, meat, kitchen and candy, all in various sizes. And let's not even begin to talk about corkscrews, where the stylistic possibilities are mind-boggling. For the serious entertainer, there are lighted ice-sculpture forms and silver and gold candelabras. Or perhaps you're in the market for a silver tea service. On the other end of the scale are polyester, flannel-backed table cloths on large rolls that can be custom cut to your specifications. Speaking

of size, the varieties of size on most items ranges from ultra-small to super-jumbo.

Increasingly, say the brothers, retail clients are buying industrial grade kitchen equipment. These wares are constructed to withstand abuse over a long life, much more so than department store standard-issue counterparts.

"Our target market is really everybody from the general consumer to the large hotel. We don't actively solicit business, but word of mouth gets around that we have some very special goods at great prices."

Where does Kittredge's fit in, price-wise, compared to your average discount department store? That's a tough one to answer says Barry, because so much of their merchandise is high-grade commercial or industrial, and can be expensive in the short-run. "I honestly feel that we have the lowest prices available for the merchandise we carry. There are other food service dealers around, and they buy from us for resale." Simple items, however, that are similar to those found in department stores, do cost less. You can get several dozen wineglasses, for instance, for under \$45.

One final note: A customer confessed to us that she began shopping Kittredge's because she was particularly fond of the place settings at a particular dining establishment. She considered a program of pilferage, but instead asked the management if it was possible for her to obtain a set of her own. The restaurant let her in on the Kittredge secret.

Kittredge advertises solely through word-of-mouth and first-hand experience. "We have chosen not to advertise," says Barry, "and we don't have sales reps that are out on the road selling for us, getting the bulk of their orders from catalogs. We take a different approach. We have all the merchandise here at the showroom available for people to look at and feel, touch if they want to. They drive from all over the place to shop here."

The original showroom, founded in 1920, was at the corner of Bond and Main Street in downtown Springfield. In 1947, they moved for 10 years to Dwight Street, and then they settled in at their present Columbus Avenue location alongside I-91 North.

Judith Hart Fournier

Looking
for
a place to go?

Check out
the Advocate's
Great Getaway
Section!

GRAND

CANTA

138 Memorial
73



NEW MA

Fine Ita

Full Di

PIZZA &

Take-Out Available

HUNAN

京 CHINESE R

BEST NEW

ADVOCATE
BEST
OF THE
VALLEY
1988
SECOND PLACE

Thanks to th
in the Best of
only open fo
we are pleas

*FULL LIQ

261 King St., Northam

Open 7 days

TAKE OUT SI



Come visit our ne

CHRIS

W

-COUPON

22 MENU ITE
(Excluding de
When seated
entire party v
Salad bar \$1.1

SUMMER SPECIALS-

\$5.95
Scallops • Se
Turkey • Boston
SATU

Comb
Prime Rib and
UNLIMITED
Reservations acc
Your Ho

Rte. 9, Williamsburg, MA
413-268-7811

STEAK

DAILY
SPECIALS

SUNDAYS
Prime Rib
Special

INT

NEV

fo

LIG