

Loren and Regena Lance – Mildred Store

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Peanut clusters. Coconut bon bons. Peanut brittle. Chocolate cream fudge. Those delicious old-fashioned candies used to be a hallmark of the Christmas season. They still are, at a remarkable store in rural Kansas. This store offers those candies and much, much more. This is a special holiday edition of Kansas Profile.

Loren and Regena Lance are the owners of the Mildred Store in Mildred, Kansas. Mildred is in Allen County. The post office in Mildred has closed, so the mailing address is the nearby town of Moran.

Regena grew up here at Mildred, and Loren grew up thirty miles south. He is a self-taught musician and farmer. He was trained as a diesel mechanic and now has played country music all over southeast Kansas. Regena is a teacher and administrator. After earning her masters degree online, she is Dean of Instruction at Fort Scott Community College.

Loren and Regena live near the community of Mildred. Brown's Grocery, owned by a man named Charles Brown, was a mainstay in the community for many years. His wife's name, by the way, was Lucille – sounds like Peanuts.

The store had a deli which produced an item called the Charlie Brown sandwich which was well-known in the region. Passing trains would even stop so the engineers could get a sandwich. But after Mr. Brown passed away, the store eventually closed.

In 2014, Loren and Regena Lance purchased the building and re-opened it as the Mildred Store. "We added new lighting and a point-of-sale system, but we kept the nostalgia," Loren said. "There's a hundred years of antiques in that store." In addition to old furniture stored in the back, some of which is now being sold, there's everything from old pop bottles to photos of school basketball teams to sales records from the 1930s.

The store offers general grocery items, and Loren and Regena re-established the deli and meat market. "We have fresh cut steaks and we cut our own pork chops," Loren said. The deli is once again offering the Charlie Brown sandwich. "We brought the Brown family back, and they were so appreciative," Regena said.

"We had t-shirts made saying 'Mildred Store, home of the famous Charlie Brown Sandwich,'" Regena said. "They were so popular that we had to re-order."

The Mildred Store now offers deli trays and vegetable and fruit trays for special orders. Seating has been expanded in the store as well. "One of our tables is Charlie Brown's old butcher block which we found stored in the back," Loren said.

Another innovation is the live music which the store hosts on each month's third Saturday night. In the summer, they will block off the main street and play outside. Of course, this is dear to Loren's heart as a musician. "We'll play country, gospel and bluegrass," he said. "Anybody can come in and play. Nobody gets paid and it's free to the public," Loren said. "We'll keep the store and deli open late."

All this has revitalized the store and community. "The best part is the people who are so appreciative to have this open again," Regena said.

"The reason we opened this up again is for the community," Loren said. "There is an organization here called Allen County Thrive which focuses on small business, and they have been so supportive."

Service to the community is a top priority for Loren and Regena. “Our cell phone numbers are on that door,” Loren said. “If somebody needs something after hours, we’ll open up for them.” The store is even exploring a home delivery service. During the holidays, the store orders old-time Christmas candies.

It’s part of the personal service one can find in a rural community – in this case, the town of Mildred, population 28 people. Now, that’s rural. For more information, go to www.mildredstore.com.

Peanut clusters. Coconut bon bons. Peanut brittle. Chocolate cream fudge. Those are some of the old-time Christmas candies which the Mildred Store has ordered for its patrons. We commend Loren and Regena Lance for making a difference with innovative service to the community. The results are sweet.

Wishing you happy holidays, for the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.