

Ray Mini-Mall Now A Reality



Long Ray Mini Mall corridor running east and west



Directors of the Ray Development Corp. pose in the Mini-Mall
L to R: Julian Johnson, Walt Johnson, Andy Miller, W. S.
Raymond

By Wayne Lubenow

RAY, N.D. - The mini-mall, some experts say, is the way to save the small town - and quite a few mini-malls are being built in North Dakota.

Here in Ray, in oil and ranch country, one man had a mini-mall idea 15 years ago. Today it's a reality.

He is W. S. (Fritz) Raymond, a fiftyish bachelor who is president of the Citizens State Bank of Ray (with a branch at Wildrose.) Not uncoincidentally, Raymond is also president of the Ray Development Corporation which built the mall. That gives the development corporation a pipeline to financing.

The people and businessmen of the Ray community (population 800) are gambling \$580,000 that this mini-mall will keep their town alive and well. That is a lot of money and the mall will have to draw a lot of customers.

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The mini-mall should do the trick. It is a beautiful place. It is called the Ray Mini-Mall, but it isn't really that mini. It is 280 by 140 feet, has 39,200 square feet of space and covers over half a block.

There are 20 businesses inside, all in carpeted, air-conditioned, well-lighted splendor. There are two corridors, one 16 feet wide and one 12 feet wide with shops on both sides of each corridor.

In the mall are Raymond's bank, a cocktail lounge and steakhouse, a recreation parlor, radio-TV sales and service, tax consultant and bookkeeping firm, curtain and decor shop, bookstore and novelty firm, two firms of attorneys, insurance company, a variety store, Gambles store, men's clothing store, Piggly Wiggly grocery store, Montana-Dakota Utilities and a self-service laundromat. There is space yet for a beauty and barber shop.

Unlike the big malls in the cities that are located on the periphery, this mini-mall is right downtown, right on the main street. Old, run-down business buildings were acquired to make room for it.

What's more, the other half block is paved for customer parking. So attractive is the mini-mall that about half the businesses in it are new, the other half old businesses that moved in.

It was a big step for a small town and the prime mover was Fritz Raymond. "I had this idea for 15 years," he says, "but I had a hard time getting anybody interested."

Why is that? "Well," Raymond says, "They figured it was too costly. Some people just want to make a small investment and then sit back and milk the cow to death."

The Community Development group was incorporated in April 1971 and that original group, Raymond says, "did make a concrete effort, but it didn't go."

That's when Raymond made up his mind "something had to be done." He came up with the plan for the present mini-mall, different in design and concept from the first efforts.

"I didn't really run into much opposition," he says, "Just an awful lot of doubt."

When the old Development Corporation wouldn't listen to him, he went through the City Council, threatened to start a new group. "They doubted my figures," Raymond says.

But they started listening and believing and Raymond became president of the Development Corporation and began push-