

PJ's The Store closes in Middlefield

By Cindy DUBY

MIDDLEFIELD-- The atmosphere was somber this week at *PJ's The Store*, as proprietor Phyllis Jean Turner closed the establishment for the last time yesterday, February 28. The move, which came at a time when business seemed to be booming, took some here by surprise.

According to Turner, the closing

was not prompted by any shortage of patronage or any business struggles. She said she was taking leave from the business to take care of some health concerns, but was optimistic that her absence would be only temporary. "If everything works out, I'll be back," Turner reassured.

The closing is a big disappointment to this little town, where *PJ's* was the one and only place to enjoy coffee in the company of community. *PJ's* offered affordable and tasty homemade breakfast, lunch, and coffee break fare, and convenience store items that will now have to be purchased in adjacent towns. Moreover, the store's closing

continued on page 6



Middlefield

Cindy Duby
623-5649

PJ's TO CLOSE

from page 1

leaves a void for a great many customers who regularly gathered at the store to socialize and catch up on community goings-on.

While some visited the establishment simply as a matter of convenience, others considered the regular crowd a sort of extended community family where PJ served as mother hen. Turner's good nature fostered good times and laughter, making many a visit to PJ's a simple matter of fun.

Early this week Turner herself was somber, leaving the impression that it was quite difficult for her to bid farewell to her flock, even if only temporarily. In a long list of gratitudes, she said she was particularly thankful to Brain Miller who kept the store fires burning, to the Town Highway crew who kept PJ's accessible, and to the entire town for its overwhelming support. "This town supported me one hundred fifty percent," she said.

Turner opened the store, which she leased from building owners Art Muller and Janice Haywood, in May 1999, following the store's second closing in a decade, and a series of five short-term proprietors. Prior to that the store was under the ownership of George and Grace Olds, who ran Olds' General Store for a half century, from 1927 to 1977.

Turner previously operated the successful Huckleberry Bakery and Restaurant in Huntington, with her late husband Jim. Her skill in food service and baking, coupled with her fun-loving personality, immediately drew a regular following to PJ's *The Store*.

"Phyllis has a personality that everybody seems to like," said Nancy Pease, a regular PJ's patron. "She treats all people the same, no matter who they are, and makes everybody feel welcome. She's got the right kind of attitude."

"Middlefield never had anything like this," said Pease. "It was a place where people could sit down and eat

and be with friends. Even people you didn't know would come and sit with you, just being good neighbors. Sometimes we'd sit for hours. We're really going to miss it a lot."

"It's a big loss to the town," said Jack Kozynoski, another PJ's regular, who expressed concern that the town's post office, located in the same building, might also eventually go.

According to Middlefield Postmaster Charlie Stickle, postal operations in town will not be impacted by PJ's closing. The office will remain open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday. The one drawback, Stickle said, would be that boxholders would no longer be able to access inside postal boxes after post office hours, as they could when the store was open.

Kozynoski said he has supported the Middlefield store during all of its recent management changes. "I really wish more people in town used the store. It's hard to make ends meet in a small town if everybody doesn't use it," he said. "And it's a lot of hours for Phyllis. By noon time she's already got her day in."

Kozynoski found both social and economic value in the services delivered at PJ's. "For a small lunch fee you had a real good meal. You couldn't go wrong," he said. "Phyllis made a good meal for the money, she kept the local people happy, and if people wanted things, she did her best to get it. She was a real friendly, local person and she was concerned about the town. It's a real sorry day," said Kozynoski about PJ's closing.

Should Turner follow through with a future operation in town, Kozynoski said he would certainly be there to support the business. Likewise, Nancy Pease said she and her husband would offer their support to any future Turner venture.

"If she comes back, and we're still living, we'll come back," said Pease. photos