



Doug Moe: Goodbye party at Parman's on Friday

DOUG MOE | dmoe@madison.com | 608-252-6446 | Posted: Wednesday, August 10, 2011 7:00 am

Keith Parman really didn't want a party or any kind of ceremony to mark the end of an era — the 70-year run of Parman's Service Station on Monroe Street — so his buddies did what any good friends would do under the circumstances.

They ignored him.

As a consequence, if you stop by Parman's on Friday (and you should), you'll get a chance to thank Keith and say goodbye and maybe enjoy a surprise or two that his friends — the morning coffee guys who call themselves "the A Group" — have in store.

Friday is the last day they'll be working on cars at Parman's, 3502 Monroe St., though Keith, 73, will be around next week tying up loose ends.

A new development, a mix of commercial space and apartments, will be going up soon.

It is possible to wish it every success and still mourn the passing of Parman's, which has always served the Monroe Street area and the city at large as much more than a service station.

"The A Group" was talking about that early Tuesday morning. As usual, Keith had stopped by Lane's Bakery for pastry on the way in and had the coffee pot at Parman's fired up by 7 a.m.

The dawn patrol has evolved over the years but the current roster usually includes Norbert Anderson, who has known the Parman family since he was a boy and is retired from the state Department of Transportation; Dick Lindauer, the retired Madison firefighter best known for his years of playing Santa Claus; retirees Tom McCarthy and Dick Steinhofer; and, finally, a gruff but slyly charming bear of a man named Alf Klopppedal.

Klopppedal had the misfortune of being absent Tuesday, and so, naturally, the others had great fun at his expense.

Alf, they said, is nearly consumed by his passionate antipathy toward an athletics administrator who works on the other end of Monroe Street.

Sports are a topic at Parman's most mornings, along with the state of the world and how good or miserable one or another of the group might look on any given day. This week, as might be expected, nostalgia was in the air.

Norb Anderson speculated that all the socializing over coffee at Parman's — subsequent groups gather after the "A" boys have departed — might have begun because Keith and his late brother, Clayton "Junior" Parman, would never just pump gas (the station had pumps until 1998) for a customer.

"They'd check the oil and tires and wash your windows," Anderson said. "People started figuring they might as well come inside and get some coffee."

The dedication to service and the camaraderie it engendered dates to the Parman brothers' father, Clayton "Clay" Parman, who opened the station in 1941. The family owned farmland in the area and a street off Odana Road — Parman Terrace — is named for them.

In those early days, Clay's wife and the boys' mother, Janice Parman, did the books for the business. Keith and Junior — who died last December — began working part-time at the station while they were still in high school.



Both eventually entered the business full time.

They lived near each other with their families — Junior's son, Gary, became an important part of the business — worked hard and quietly operated what became one of the city's most revered small businesses.

I say quietly because the Parmans were always a little shy about publicity.

I can count on one hand the number of people who have said no to interviews in the last 15 years, but I never could get the brothers to agree to sit down with me. I think Keith finally did this week because he wanted the chance to honor Junior and their extended families. Keith said he doesn't have any specific retirement plans, though he might want to make some quick, since "the A Group" has been threatening to show up at Parman's house in the mornings for coffee and donuts.

For now, they'll settle for the party Friday at the service station.

It's a party Keith never really intended to have, but then, who does he think he is, the owner?

Contact Doug Moe at 608-252-6446 or dmoe@madison.com.