

Team Members Reflect on 50 years of Holidays with Meijer

It was 4 a.m. under cloudy skies when Doug Zoller pulled on his coat and started his fully loaded truck. In early December, some may note the resemblance between the bearded Doug and everyone's favorite jolly gift-giver. Doug's beard may never be the length of Santa's, but the 3.3 million miles he's driven while making deliveries to stores – especially during the holidays – have surely gone a long way in helping Mr. Claus maintain his reputation.

One of five team members who began working for Meijer in 1970, Doug – along with Dave McLellan and David Boire from our Supply Chain team and Phil Kilbourn and Larry Levin from our Store Operations team – has gained a lot of experience and personal know-how over the years, but still focuses on teamwork as the key to success at Meijer.

“I'm just one person doing my job for an efficient part of our company,” said Doug, who has been a fleet driver since the mid-80s after years of working various store and warehouse positions. “If we don't do a good job, our stores can't do a good job. One thing I've learned from working the [holiday] season for the past 50 years is no matter what happens, we can conquer anything together.”

The holidays are always busy for Meijer Distribution Centers, but for team members Dave McLellan and David Boire, the importance of loading trucks in Grand Rapids and Lansing this year was even more crucial. Since the mid-70s, they've worked in various facilities supporting the more than 400 drivers currently in the Meijer Fleet, including responsibilities as selectors, unitizers, slot controllers, clamp truck operators, and stand-up forklift drivers.

With three children and seven grandchildren, Dave now lives in Hudsonville, Mich. with Denise, his wife of 42 years. He credits many of his former bosses over the years, including Fred Meijer, who he says led by example.

“They were down to earth, worked hard, had time for their families and showed me that my job provided a way to earn a living and raise a family of my own,” he said. “When your bosses are that way and looking for you to show up, be there and keep plugging away. If it's difficult, stick to it and it will get easier.”


For cashier Phil Kilbourn, a knack for numbers steered him toward the checkout lanes, but his interest in customers is what's driven him to be especially kind during the holidays. Thanks to years of interacting at stores in Kalamazoo, Okemos and Mason, Mich., he understands shopping for gifts can be stressful, so he does his best to make them smile. He also tries to remember the names of his regular shoppers so he can say hello and wish them well as he hands them their receipt.

While he has no idea how many gifts he has checked out over the years, he understands his role in helping Santa deliver the presents. “I do my best to be careful when handling their merchandise during the holiday season,” he said. “If a customer cares enough to buy a gift for someone, the packaging should be as perfect as they intended.”

After 50 years of Christmases at Meijer, the team members responsible for selecting, loading, delivering, stocking and bagging untold millions and millions of gifts all agree on one thing. Even with the challenges of 2020, they say this year might have been more special because it was shared with only those friends and family closest to them.

For Store Director Larry Levin, who completed more than 50 years of service at Meijer when he left his Cedar Springs store on Christmas Eve, the morning after Santa visited was also a gift that he and his wife, Kathy, have patiently awaited.

“I am grateful for all of the team members I've worked with during all of those holiday shopping seasons and proud I've done my part in helping our customers for all those years,” he said. “So, Christmas Day will be my first day of retirement and our first day of self-quarantine. Once we're able to travel, we're looking forward to seeing our kids, hugging our grandchildren and figuring out where the road will take us.”

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