

“Out of Books ... into Life”: The Story of the Bulldog Express

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Photo by Brittany Stevens

Leeton, Missouri

Photo courtesy of www.zazzle.com

LEETON
XXL
BULLDOGS

Missouri



Photo courtesy of www.bestplaces.net

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Photo courtesy of www.leeton.k12.mo.us

Grocery history

- Leeton grocers have come and gone...
- Closed corner store
- More than 20 years ago, a grocer opened up downtown with a deli; closed in the 1980s
- William's Market tried his luck only to empty the shelves in 1998



Photos by Brittany Stevens

A mirage in the food desert

- Nearest full-fledged grocery store more than 15 miles away
- Only source locally for groceries was Casey's General Store:

Foods high in sodium and fat, little access to protein, fruits and vegetables

- Besides gas, alcohol and cigarettes, the Bulldog Express carries items local gas stations do and then some



Mirage to reality



Photo by Brittany Stevens

- In 2007, a community member came forward with his wish to see Leeton go back to the good, old days
- Marijayne Manley and Bonnie Seymour, another LHS teacher, decided to take the challenge on
- Built in 1896, the building had been a bank – the students renovated themselves
- The school district loaned the start-up cost
- Sunflower Bank donated the building

[ABC World News Clip](#)

How it functions

- Students from LHS's agribusiness, marketing and entrepreneurship classes run the show
- Off-campus facility (versus a classroom/organizational store)
- Only one of its kind in the state, pioneer of three in the nation
- Sells frozen meat, milk, eggs and meal essentials like vegetables and fruits from the local farmers market





Photo by Brittany Stevens

The Rural Grocery Initiative: School-based enterprise

One of four primary rural grocery models endorsed through the RGI, the ongoing project through the Center for Engagement and Community Development, which aims to facilitate and save rural groceries, viewing them as critical pillars to the success of small towns.

A win-win situation

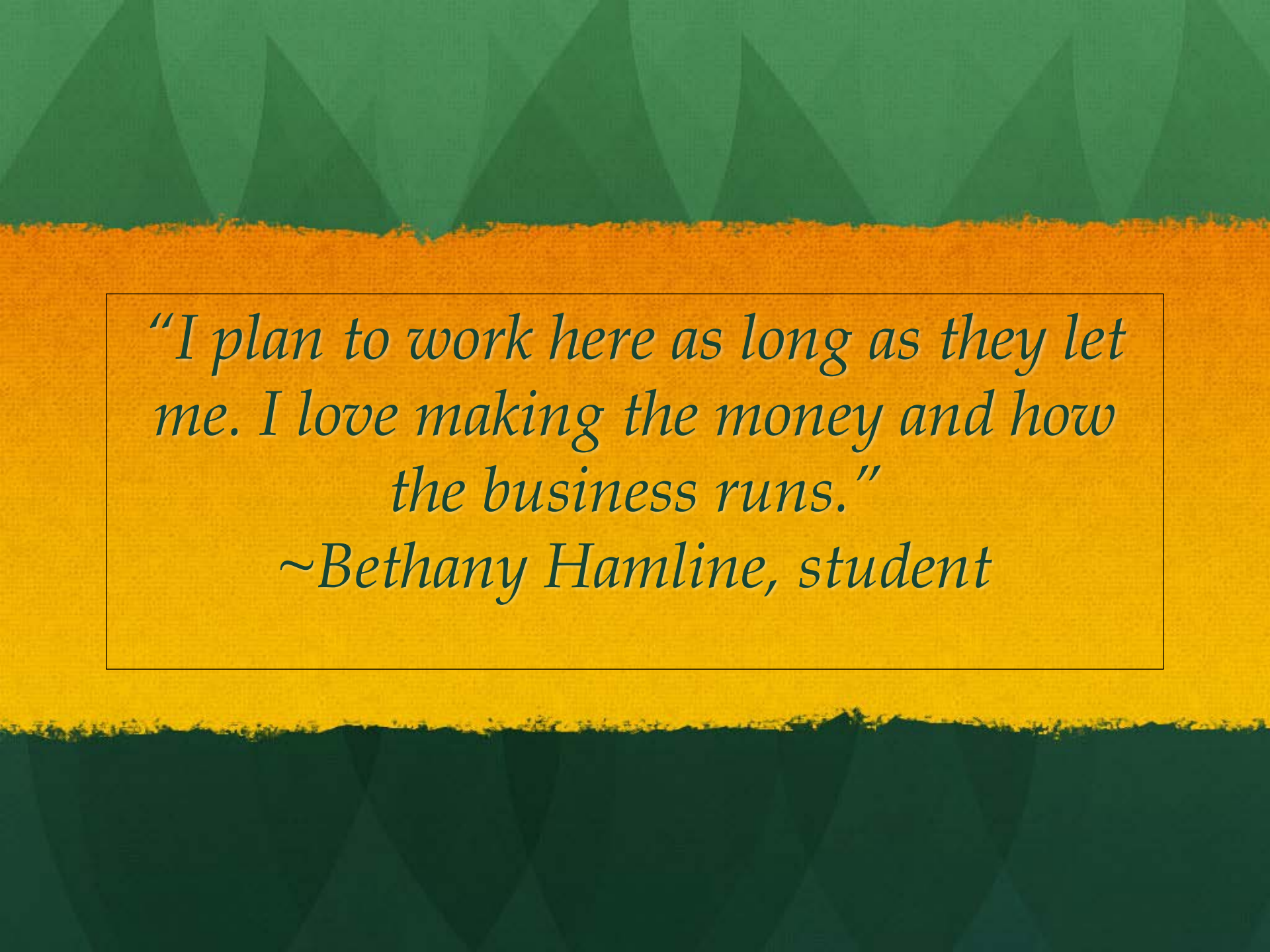
- Students earn class credit during school hours and minimum wage during evenings and weekends
- Responsibilities: customer service, maintenance, stocking, ordering, merchandising, bookkeeping
- Employee hierarchy with room to advance
- “Mama Manley” and “Mama Seymour” as they have been lovingly nicknamed oversee the students



Photo by Brittany Stevens

“We have a good relationship with all of our students, but with this program it’s a different relationship – closer. We have conversations that we wouldn’t have with other students ... a lot of times we’re the surrogate parents.”

~Marijayne Manley



“I plan to work here as long as they let me. I love making the money and how the business runs.”

~Bethany Hamline, student

Fulfilling community need



Photo courtesy of Rich Sugg/Kansas City
Star/Newscom/File

- One of the driving forces of opening the Bulldog Express was the assisted living residence in town
- Many senior residents do not travel
- Convenience stores are expensive
- A place to socialize for the young and old
- The assisted living facility utilizes the Bulldog Express delivery service, which takes place Friday after 5 p.m.

What the future holds

- At the time of the article, Manley and Seymour had applied for a \$20,000 grant toward the goal of expansion
- If the store were to receive a grant, it plans on using the money to purchase a Morton Building and begin a deli
- The pair is also considering writing a book



In January 2012 Manley and Seymour were honored with the University of Central Missouri's 2012 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award for leadership.