

# BEHIND THE STORE SHELVES

*Updated Digital Edition*

**By William “Bill” Drake**

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It is only fitting that the updated edition of the original Coborn’s history book, “Behind the Store Shelves,” be published in 2021 in an “digital version,” as this year marks the centennial celebration of the opening of the first Coborn’s grocery store in Sauk Rapids, Minnesota. The original book was published in 2014. Much has changed since that time and you will see these updates referenced throughout this new digital edition.

Few businesses reach the 100-year milestone – the average lifespan of businesses in the United States is approximately 25 years. Such longevity is even more rare among family-owned businesses, with only three percent surviving through fourth-generation leadership or beyond, as is the case with Coborn’s, where fifth-generation family members are now active leaders in the company.

The seven years that separate this and the 2014 first edition of this book have been a tumultuous period for the business of food retailing. New competitors have entered the marketplace, consumers have evolved, and technology has altered the way we communicate, shop, work and recreate. Many companies have suffered due to their lack of agility and failures in responding to these changes. Conversely, Coborn’s has prospered. Since 2014, Coborn’s has expanded its core grocery store count (59) by 28% through new store construction and the successful acquisition of both the Hornbacher’s and Marketplace Foods banners. The recent acquisition of Andy’s Liquor, in Rochester, Minnesota, brings the liquor location count to 50. New pharmacy and coffee shop locations have been added as well, bringing the total retail location count to 132 when adding in a select few other business units that the company operates in tandem to the primary grocery store operations. Making it all work are the 9,500 employees, many owners themselves through the employee stock ownership plan (ESOP).



While much has changed in the world in which Coborn's operates, much has remained the same in terms of the foundational elements that have driven Coborn's success. First is the strong and unwavering commitment to the company culture and the core values of:

- Being a great place to work for employees
- Enriching the communities in which we operate
- Executional excellence – being the best everyday
- Being cost conscious in all decisions to ensure profitability
- Treating ALL with dignity and respect
- Guest focus – exceeding the expectations of our customers

Simple in concept but extraordinarily difficult to implement day in and day out over long periods of time through changes in leadership, competition and customers.

The second foundational success factor has been the company's agility and willingness to change, adapt and take advantage of changing circumstances while remaining true to the aforementioned core values. As change accelerates in the world around us, this agility will be evermore critical in the future.

Much has occurred and many milestones have been reached since the publishing of this book's first edition in 2014. Two events, in particular, are worth noting.

Dan Coborn, the third-generation leader of the company, passed away on March 15, 2017 at the age of 86. Dan's leadership, resolve and lifelong commitment to the company and its communities live on in the culture and core values of the company. He is sorely missed.

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought great sorrow to our communities and profoundly changed our lives in so many ways. Supermarkets have risen to the challenge of steadfastly remaining open and filling the void created by the widespread closure of restaurants. Coborn's employees, particularly those frontline workers in the stores and supply chain, have truly been heroic in their efforts in keeping the stores stocked and staffed. Their efforts are greatly appreciated.

The future is always uncertain and there is no doubt that Coborn's will be tested and challenged in countless ways. I'm confident that strong leadership, a solid foundation of timeless core values and the ever-strong commitment of thousands of employees will pave the way toward continued success.

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