

24 Hours in Toledo

MEIJER (3 A.M. TO 4 A.M.)

For some shoppers and workers, night time is the right time

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*This is the fourth in *The Blade's* series of 24 weekly stories that will chronicle people and places in Toledo, hour by hour. Today we visit the Meijer store on Alexis Road.*

Terry Keeler likes to do his grocery shopping after 3 a.m.

Can you blame him?

Look around as he pushes a shopping cart through the 24-hour Meijer store on Alexis Road: There are no lines behind the cashiers, no people clogging the aisles. It's a shopper's Shangri-La.

"You're in here all by yourself," Mr. Keeler says. "It's like you've got the store to yourself."

Almost.

The only noise is that of the floor-scrubbing machines employees are pushing around, and there's some music still pumping politely through the speakers. Only two cashier lanes are open — 23 and 24 — and there's no one for them to help at the moment.

Tonight, Mr. Keeler, 48, who hauls parts for Toledo Jeep Assembly, is here on a mission from his wife following his late-night shift.

"I'm after milk, and Daddy's hungry for some potato chips," the Walbridge man says as he grabs a bag of chips from a shelf and drops it into his empty cart.

MULTIMEDIA

[See and hear the activities at Meijer from 3 a.m. to 4 a.m.](#)



Jeremy Janiszewski waits for customers at the register at Meijer on East Alexis Road in Toledo. (THE BLADE/ALLAN DETRICH)

The funny thing is, his isn't the only car in the parking lot. There are a couple dozen.

Keno Alums, 34, of North Toledo, is here too, having figured out the perks of picking up a few things after his work at the Jeep complex: "Better parking."

And Tim Byram has found it the perfect time to get in and out quickly for a pack of Luvs during a break from his job in medical waste.

"I figure on my break I might as well grab some diapers," he says as he hurries to the register. "I ain't got nothing else to do at 3 o'clock in the morning."

A cashier tells stories of other colorful characters who sometimes show up in the early morning hours: There are drag queens and strippers, one of whom once tried to pay for her items with "Scarlett dollars" used at a local "gentleman's club"; customers who race the motorized carts, and adults riding a kiddie pony like a real horse. (Thankfully, though, no robbers.)

The relative quiet of the store can be misleading.

“We are a very busy place,” says night store manager Stan Jechura.

And he’s not just talking about the typical people who shop in the middle of the night — those who work second shift, who can’t sleep, who are sick and need medicine, or who simply don’t like crowds. It’s his night squad’s job to make sure the store is clean, stocked, and ready to go for the next day’s business.

“We’re responsible for putting the store back together every night,” says Mr. Jechura, 38, of Maumee.

At the moment, he’s in the back driving a forklift, unloading a truck of fresh groceries. He’s only been doing this shift for five months and doesn’t seem to mind, because it allows him to have dinner with his family and spend some time with them before coming to work.

Meanwhile, employees like John Gapski are restocking shelves — filling them with bottles of water, breakfast foods, and more. Standing around in knee pads, he’s used to the heavy lifting and the typical responsibility of moving 70 cases an hour.

He’s been at this night work for more than 30 years, between here at Food Town. That’s where he was hired as a high schooler when his dad worked there.

“At the time, I had long hair and you were allowed to keep long hair,” the 53-year-old bachelor said. “Now, I have no hair.”

Jeremy Janiszewski, 20, a cashier from Luna Pier, Mich., prefers working at night, just like both of his parents did.

“It’s convenient ... I’m a night owl,” he says. “You gotta be alive to work third shift.”

The shift allows him to see his 16-month-old son, Ethan, in daycare in the mornings and his girlfriend — who works the next register over — at night.

It brings some peculiar challenges, too, especially when he tries to greet customers. Does he say “good day,” “good night,” or “good morning”?

“It’s kind of confusing,” he says.”

Maybe the worst thing about working third shift is the TV. There’s not a lot of great programming for 3 a.m.

Jeff Germain, 19, often finds *Antiques Roadshow* on when he takes a break, lounging on a nice black couch while a couple of co-workers relax in recliners.

“That’s the only thing we have on the television,” he said. “They don’t have cable. There’s nothing else on.”

On a nearby wall, a scrolling message board that flashes: “A smile is contagious, pass it on,” and Mr. Germain obliges. He’s only been working this shift for a couple of months, but he’s adapted to the schedule now. The money’s good and there’s room for advancement, so he’s happy. But it does affect the rest of his life.

“On days that I have off, I sleep all day,” he said.”

As 4 a.m. draws near, suddenly there’s a backup at the registers. Four shopping carts have emerged from nowhere to check out.

At the front of the line are Vicki Reynolds and her fiance, Jeff Haws, both of whom work late at the Jeep plant. They’ve got a cart full of groceries, laundry detergent, a Duraflame log — and, according to Mr. Haws, a plan for the rest of their morning.

“We’re gonna go home, build a fire, eat something, then go to bed.”

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