



Gazette photo by Rita Seymour

Paul Horsfall Jr. has little room to maneuver through the aisles of his variety store stuffed with merchandise.

Sold on eccentricity

Popular Lansing store draws on unconventional inventory

By Rita Seymour

Gazette Northeast Iowa Bureau

LANSING — This woman holding a Monchichi doll calls herself a professional shopper and also a great fan of anything that brings back memories.

So Jayne Gruber of Cedar Rapids thought she hit the jackpot the other day when she found herself at the Horsfall Variety Store among a million items, including outdated dolls and other collectibles.

"I keep thinking I'm going to leave, but then I don't. I find more things to look at," said Gruber, admiring a Monchichi doll, which she hadn't seen in years. She was visiting this northeast Iowa store for the first time.

During the Christmas season, lots of people stop to see the store in Lansing, a community of about 1,000 people along the Mississippi River.

Owner Paul Horsfall Jr. says he has just about everything, "whether you want it or not," and boxes upon boxes of merchandise line his aisles. He says he's a better buyer than seller, which

is why some boxes are stacked so high they touch the ceiling.

One wonders how Horsfall keeps track of his inventory, which he estimates at 1 million items.

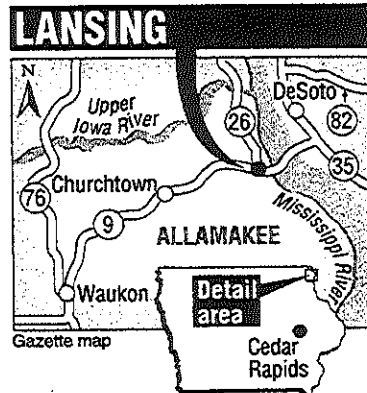
"Right up here," Horsfall says, tapping his finger on his head.

At this variety store, you can find everything from soap on a rope to canning jar rings to toilet seats and greeting cards. Horsfall even sells a variety of baseball caps, some sure to get a man in trouble.

Like one that reads, "Missing Wife and Dog. Reward for Dog."

"The guys who buy that are usually already on their own," Horsfall says, laughing. Or they soon will be.

The Monchichi toy doll that Gruber said she played with as a kid goes for



Gazette map

\$1.25.

But the hottest-selling item this Christmas season, Horsfall says, is a balancing bird for \$1.49. Horsfall likes to walk around with the bird on the tip of his finger, and his customers seem to like it, too. Everybody wonders why the bird doesn't fall.

Senior citizens seem to love shopping here because it is one of the few places they can buy "Snuggies," a tank top and underwear package for \$3.99.

About the only problem with his store, Horsfall concedes, is that it can be difficult to get around. Nearly every inch of the store's 3,800 square feet is taken up. Boxes of merchandise surround his legs even at the cashier's counter.

So Horsfall keeps some of his merchandise outside. Boxes of Christmas cards, doll sets and plastic sleds are stacked on tables.

"I'm having another big shipment coming in a few days," Horsfall said, looking around for an empty space.

Many of Horsfall's customers are regulars.

Many of Horsfall's customers are regulars who say they like his variety and prices. Horsfall relies on more than 100 vendors to get him the variety he believes people want. Rose Marks of nearby DeSoto, Wis., said she shops at Horsfall's during the Christmas season.

"You can't find some of this stuff anywhere else," she said.

STORE HOURS:

Monday	9-5
Tuesday	9-5
Wednesday	9-5
Thursday	9-5
Friday	9-5
Saturday	9-5
Sunday	12-4