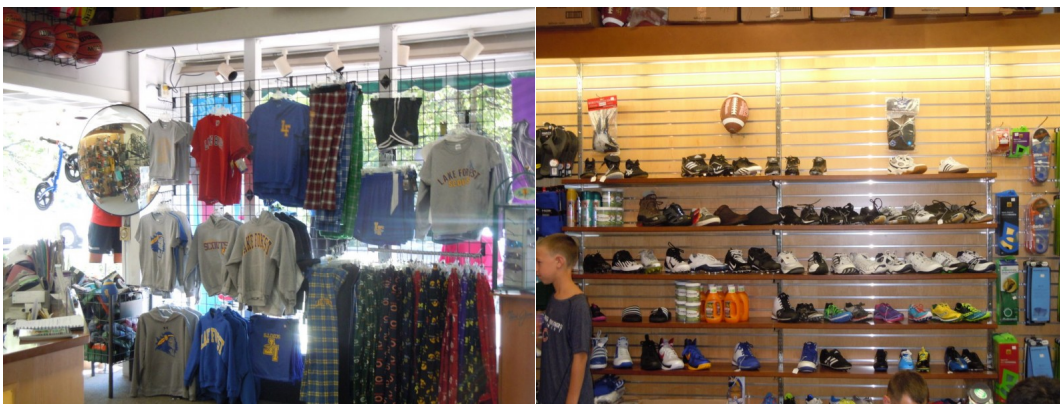


# Service Is First With Kiddle's

Long time family operated Lake Forest business spans three generations of merchants in one family.

Lake Forest-Lake Bluff, IL

By STEVE SADIN (Patch Staff) - August 23, 2012 1:09 pm ET



How does a reporter get a story?

Sometimes we go to a city council meeting or a football game and write about what happened. On other occasions we learn about someone who has made a special contribution to the community and tell the story.

And on very rare occasion we have a personal experience that just has to be shared and that is what brings me to publish this article about .

While riding my bicycle Friday on the Green Bay Trail between Old Elm and Westleigh Roads, I had a flat tire and had to walk the bike home. Both removing the tire and putting the bicycle in the car to take it to a shop for repair were problematic.

So, after covering the Lake Bluff Public Safety Open House Saturday, I stopped by Kiddle's and talked to Aric Shlifka, the third generation of his family to work at the store since his grandfather, Ron Shlifka, purchased it from the Kiddle family in 1968. It was started by the Kiddles in the 1930's.

There was no problem for Shlifka. He arranged for his parents, Jay and Denise Shlifka, to get the bicycle at my home on their way to work Monday at no charge. "You're in the area?" Aric asked. That was all he needed to know.

Aric did not know who I was. He learned that when I arrived Wednesday with notebook and camera to learn more about the business.

Though Kiddle's has evolved from a hardware and bicycle store when it started to a sporting goods establishment with half its space devoted to bikes and accessories today, it has kept one thing in mind for a family business to compete with large chains.

"We set ourselves apart with service," Aric said. "It's what we've got to do to compete. A Nike shoe is a Nike shoe." Part of that service is providing uniforms to schools and local sports teams. There is a large display of Scout garb in the store.

When Ron Shlifka bought the business in 1968, one of the things that intrigued him was the fact the company had Schwinn bicycles. “My grandfather bought it because it was a Schwinn franchise, Aric said.

Eventually the hardware went away and sporting goods became a staple along with bikes. A few years later, Jay Shlifka graduated from Eastern Illinois University and went to work with his father. Jay and Denise remain actively involved.

Aric and his brother, Lee Shlifka, grew up around the business and went to the University of Iowa after graduating from high school. Both joined the company when they finished college; Aric in 1999 and Lee in 2001.

The Shlifka family continues to demonstrate service. The bicycle was delivered to my home while I was writing some of the stories you are reading on Patch. The only charge was for the tire, inner tube and labor.

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