

# Here: In Ruff Creek, Greene County, Pennsylvania

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Photo by Steve Mellon ~ Story by Johnna A. Pro

It's an obvious question for a city dweller: "So, just what is the difference between a convenience store and a general store?" The woman behind the counter doesn't hesitate.



Michael Poland, 9, asks his dad, Jasper, for a snack at the Ruff Creek General Store in Greene County. The two were taking a break from bow hunting nearby.

"Feed, boots, hardware," the woman says with a soft Southern accent. "Character," one of her customers calls out.

"A lot of *characters*," she corrects, smiling sweetly and winning laughter from others in the store.

Easy, light banter with neighbors.

It's part of the charm that makes the Ruff Creek General Store, with its hardwood floors and packed shelves, different from a modern convenience store.

"My wife and I call this Ruff Creek Mall," says Brent Burnett, who lives nearby. "They got everything you need here. If Raymond doesn't have it, you don't need it. Right, Raymond?"

"Well, I don't know about that," says owner Raymond Stockdale, "but we can keep you going for a couple of days." By Stockdale's definition, a general store should meet the general needs of the community. At Ruff Creek General Store, in Ruff Creek outside Waynesburg, Greene County, they sell everything from sheep feed to cappuccino. You can rent a DVD, grab lunch at the deli, buy groceries from the superette, shop for new boots or just while away a few minutes in the afternoon chatting with the locals. You'll find buckets and brooms, pet supplies and lottery tickets. They sell gas outside. The bulletin board is news central for the surrounding rural community. It recently reminded everyone to please bring a covered dish to the sheephead mushroom contest.

**Ruff Creek General Store is the oldest continuously operating general store in southwestern Pennsylvania, so says Stockdale, a self-described history buff who hung a sign outside stating the fact.**

"There are others out there, but none that's been in business continually," Stockdale claims. "Nobody's proved me wrong." Ruff Creek General Store was opened in 1925 by the brothers Shirk who sold it in 1947 to Guy Lemmon.

Stockdale's father arrived in 1951 to be a clerk and 10 years later bought the business. Raymond and his wife, Karen, with her soft Southern drawl, took over in 1974.

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Today, they have eight employees and they're open daily from 7 a.m. till 8 p.m. On occasion, Raymond's been known to reopen for a neighbor in need, because -- well, as he puts it, a general store isn't about the merchandise.

"If you don't like people, you shouldn't be in the general store business."