

# | Invested

## Storybook setting: **THE GOOD HART GENERAL STORE**

Carolyn Sutherland probably can't help it. After decades of running the tiny Good Hart General Store in the tiniest of towns, you get to know a lot about your customers and your neighbors, and their customers and neighbors.

And so if you try to talk with her about doing business in Good Hart, you inadvertently find out instead about everything — the history of the store, the history of the town, the history of the people that comprise this sleepy resort area along Lake Michigan. It's a bit like the "Cheers" of highway M-119, without the bar, but with a cast of equally amusing and entertaining characters.

There's Carolyn and Jim Sutherland. Carolyn has run the general store for more than 40 years after moving Up North from the Detroit area to the county she long adored. She met Jim, then a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter pilot, 28 years ago, when he was in town for a family reunion and stopped by to pick up a paper; they've been married over 25 years. And then there's Ami Woods, Carolyn's daughter, who was raised in Good Hart, led the big-city life in Chicago, and came back to her roots, because, well, she missed the beach.

What is so charming about this store, its characters and its setting is its picturesque placement along one of the most scenic drives in the United States — the Tunnel of Trees. When you're driving this twisting, narrow road along the Lake Michigan shoreline, there is nothing around for a long while except glimpses of big, beautiful and mostly seasonal homes, thick forests and panoramic views of the turquoise waters of Lake Michigan down below the steep bluff.

The Good Hart General Store arrives after you're a good 20 minutes north of Harbor Springs, serving as a resting stop for M-119's thousands of annual travelers. It's easy, when you pull up, to imagine how many bicyclists, convertible drivers and motorcyclists have used the bright red store as a backdrop for their photos (M-119 is among the most popular routes for motorcycle trips in the country).

If in your mind you picture what a general store looks like — with its gourmet goodies, worn benches, fresh baked goods, maps and logowear representing the town itself — that is what you will find here. Tilted floors, hound dog and all.

"There aren't many of these," says Ami. "General stores simply don't exist like this anymore."

She's right. During the last few decades, they've been displaced in many areas of the U.S. by specialized retailers and Big Box stores. But Good Hart, in many ways, is different from most communities. Its history is rich and deep and dates back to the earliest of Native Americans, who called it "the land



Photo: G. Randall Goss

Carolyn (left) and Jim Sutherland with daughter Ami Woods (center) run the Good Hart General Store.

of the crooked tree." It's in the middle of one of the most breathtaking drives you'll ever take, whether it's during the lush green days of summer or the blazing fall color season. Its secluded beaches, with plentiful public access, can only be described as incomparable.

And it has a landmark — the Good Hart General Store.

### **40 YEARS AND COUNTING**

After a couple hours of chatting with Ami and Carolyn, and sporadically with Jim, there was an overflow of entertaining stories — about myriad topics. There were lots and lots of laughs and some descriptive story-telling, not confined to the history of the store, but about life in Good Hart overall (Population: about 500).

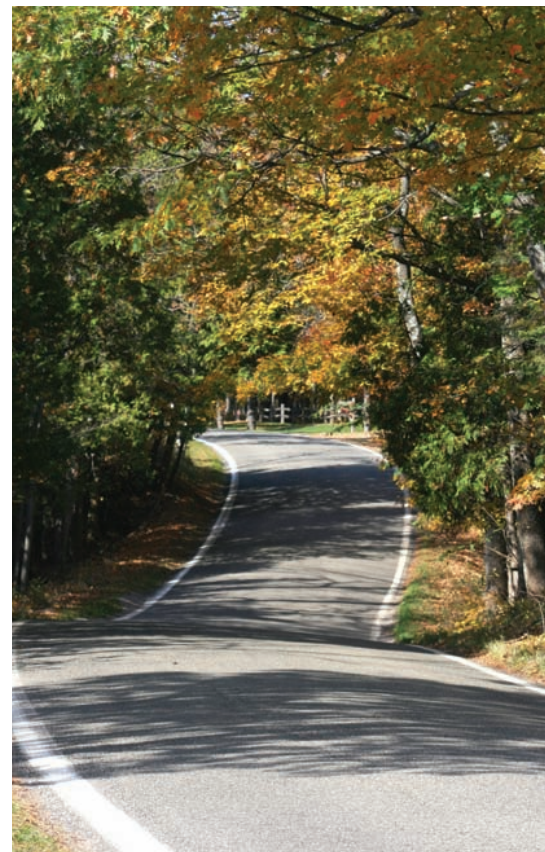
In 2011, Ami penned a piece about the store's 40th anniversary under her mother's ownership. She explained in that article that the store was built in 1934 by Cliff Powers and purchased by Sutherland in 1971, and she has operated it year 'round ever since. Housing a United States Post Office, the store oper-

“General stores simply don't exist like this anymore.”

AMI WOODS

ates six days a week to accommodate mail service for residents.

Born and raised in Huntington Woods, Sutherland had a successful early career as a dental technician and professional organist. She recalled summering in Emmet County during the time when her grandmother worked at Saks Fifth Avenue's



Tunnel of Trees

store in downtown Petoskey.

Her parents, Hazel and Ed Crowle, eventually retired to Harbor Springs where her father was a city clerk and well-remembered community activist. Sutherland and then-husband, Gary Woods, followed her parents north, purchased the store and relocated permanently to Emmet County. "We had the chance to move up here, and this is where we wanted to be, so we did,"

Carolyn said. Both were eager to leave their careers, and embrace the Up North lifestyle.

Carolyn and Jim continue to operate the store along with store manager, Jamie Harris. It is one of few businesses to achieve the 40 year mark and likely one of few authentic general stores still in operation today.

“In addition, the business continues to thrive due to successful online business and national shipping of our famous chicken and beef pot pies,” Ami noted. In 2011, the business produced nearly 10,000 pot pies that were either purchased in person, delivered locally, or shipped across the country.

Ami herself is one of the store’s known subjects. Many customers remember the day she was brought home from the hospital — during a time when steaks were cut to order, neighbors traded baskets and native art for canned goods, and the out-house was still in operation. Ami returned to Northern Michigan six years ago after a career in Chicago and she now oversees marketing efforts and specialty purchasing, while also running a successful marketing business.

“The concept of the general store as a business is a dying model. These beautiful stores that were the heart of our nation’s commerce in the ‘30s and ‘40s are no lon-

ger. I’m happy to say that we’re one who survived, and we will continue to survive,” Woods said. “Forty years is a very long time for any business, let alone a business that should have failed years ago. We’re the hub of our community and we’re proud to serve that purpose to our customers, who are also our friends.”

Those who do stay year ‘round in Good Hart, and the tourists and resorters who swell the local population during the warmest months, will find that the Good Hart General Store includes a deli featuring homemade salads and sandwiches, a bakery with fresh breads and specialty items such as the pot pies, general merchandise, provisions, unique gift items, beer, wine, liquor, branch office to Harbor Springs’ Graham Real Estate where Carolyn has served as a broker also for 40 years, and of course, the U.S. Post Office that was established in 1874 (ZIP code 49737).

Friends and neighbors hold court daily, and just as it was done 40, 50, 60 years ago, the world’s problems are solved over a doughnut and coffee.

Visitors will note several original facets of the 1934 structure including the original hardwood countertops, hand-carved wood cooler, National cash register (with bill of sale and warranty), brass Post Office boxes and stained glass windows, plus plenty of

souvenirs to remember their visit.

“We go through literally thousands of biker patches,” says Carolyn. “Everyone wants a keepsake of this trip.

“They say, ‘This is God’s country up here.’ They can’t get over how beautiful it is.”

For additional information on the Good Hart General Store, visit [www.goodhartstore.com](http://www.goodhartstore.com) or [www.facebook.com/goodhartstore](http://www.facebook.com/goodhartstore).

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