



## The View from Right Field

*by Rick Ohler*

a bi-weekly column in the

**East Aurora Advertiser**

**“Ed Vidler”**

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**W**e will all have our stories about Ed Vidler to share in the coming days, and I hope that many of you will do just that, either in this newspaper, on social media or privately among friends. He was, even before his statue came to sit on the store’s roof, the face of East Aurora.

When I remember Ed Vidler, I like to think of a warm spring day. For whatever reason, I have occasion to be on upper Main Street—the Vidler’s block—just after eight o’clock. A lone figure is on the north side of the street by the red and white awnings. It is Ed Vidler, of course, sweeping the sidewalks in front of the store, making sure that no bit of paper, leaf, cigarette butt or other detritus from the previous night’s activities remains to sully the image of his town or storefront. As he whisks, he’ll chat with passersby, amiably greeting them whether they are new to town or old friends. “That first contact you have with a potential customer is the most important,” he once told me. At nine o’clock, Ed will proudly plant the American flag in front of the store and open the door to the enchanting world of Vidler’s Five and Dime.

At mid-morning, I am coming back through town and I see what has become a common sight—a leviathan tour bus stopped in front of Vidler’s. Senior citizens, most of them women, are descending from the bus, helped down the last steps by none other than Ed himself. The successful merchant has become a dashing courtier as well, flirting with the charter crowd from Cleveland or New York City or Pittsburgh who have come to see what the fuss is about. As much as the visitors will remember the thousands of hard-to-find, whimsical and arcane items in the bins at Vidler’s, they will remember that nice man who helped them off the bus with the steady hand and ready flattery.

By early afternoon, I have discovered that I need an invoice pad for my business, so I park behind the store. I make my way up the stairs from housewares and crafts, through toys and notions, start for the stationery department, then make an about

face to the popcorn machine. No visit to Vidler's, however focused or hurried, is complete without a bag of ten-cent popcorn from the ancient machine. Horror of horrors, I realize that the bag dispenser is empty. Emergency! Around the corner, as if alerted by a sixth sense, as if he has nothing else to do, comes Ed. Immediately he grasps the severity of the problem and installs a new sheaf of bags into the dispenser. All the while we talk about local affairs—new businesses starting, old ones going caput, parking, traffic, the joys and trials of living in the same town where we grew up. Then Ed excuses himself because a TV station is coming to shoot a story and he's supposed to ham it up in front of the camera.

Near the end of the day, in the waning sunlight, I am coming up Church Street to the light at Main, when I see a particularly East Aurora sight. Behind Vidler's, high-stepping in formation, are two dozen, red-aproned Vidler's employees. At the head of the formation is drum major Ed Vidler, exhorting his charges to stay in step, smile. After all, the Memorial Day parade is coming and the Vidler's Marching Band will strut their stuff in front of the town.

Somehow, during Ed's typically busy day, he has managed to supervise a few dozen employees, keep track of the store's dizzying inventory, and polish the store's image to a bright shine. All this he does as if there is no place on Earth he'd rather be.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of emceeding Ed Vidler Day at the Aurora Theatre. After the roasts and toasts of his family and friends, Ed took the stage. Amongst his hilarious anecdotes and humble thank yous, he offered a simple recipe for success. "Find a job you love," he said, "and you'll never work a day in your life." Mission accomplished.