

Dentures, Gummy Bears all in a day's work

By Jean Fain
Special to the Globe

At least one Cambridge retail store doesn't covet Yuppies with Gold Credit cards. The All-Bright Dental Lab and Novelty Shop draws shoppers who don't even have an income bracket — minority school children.

While mega-chains munch mom-and-pop operations as if they were Gummy Bears, kids line up at proprietor Richard Marques' shop door weekdays before 7:30 a.m.

Standing on tiptoe to reach the counter, a dark-haired boy shows Marques, 51, a blackened fingernail from a skateboard accident. "How was your summer?" asks Marques.

"Hurry up," the boy's sister drowns out the giggling girls and wisecracking boys at the door.

"The store thrives," Marques says earnestly, "because I love kids." It doesn't hurt that the store is a two-minute walk from three Cambridge elementary schools. The balding but boyish Marques and his wife have eight children of their own, and he stocks the stuff kids love: candy, slush, practical joke kits.

Marques succeeds because he has imaginatively combined a sales-incentive trick used by bigger business with the careful credit-granting and friendliness of a neighborhood grocery.

Four years ago Marques thought he was opening a dental laboratory-ceramic store at 300 Broadway, a brown, shingled triple decker in the real estate wasteland between Kendall and Central squares. But as the store's long name oddly promises, Marques sells Whoopee Cushions along with his line of dentures.

A dental technician by training, he's made false teeth, bridges and partials for 30 years. He also poured the plaster busts of Elvis, Alf and Fonzle the children see sardined on bookshelves around the store.

Marques adapted his stock to reach several distinct nearby clienteles: dentists, students and a crayon box of neighborhood families — Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Greeks, Turks, Haitians, Jews.

Back when he just made teeth, Marques noticed kids parading by his door on their way to school. He invested in hot balls, licorice and bubblegum. The students bit. He branched into squirting cigarettes, itching powder, Uzi waterguns, rock posters, sports T-shirts, Christian and patriotic decals, then finally into donuts, coffee and canned goods.

"If a customer asks for something twice, I get it. If I see a good bargain and think the kids will like it, I get that, too," he says.

The credit system he's created for his young customers sets Marques' store apart. His system evens out customers' uneven cash flow — he offers selected kids one dollar, sometimes two, of credit. They only get allowances once a week, but kids shop at All-Bright every weekday. So do their parents.

"Credit's good for business, and kids learn to handle money," Marques asserts. Neysa, a 10-year-old pigtailed Dominican, gets an early-morning finance lesson before school starts. She confronts a classic textbook math problem: If bubble gum costs 25 cents and Cheese Doodles and Coke cost 60 cents each, Neysa wonders, what can she buy with a dollar?

Staring blankly at the rows of candy in the glass case, Neysa asks: "If I put back the Cheese Doodles and get the drink and gum, how much do I have left?"

"Fifteen cents," Marques answers.

"OK, I want two of those," she points at a pile of sugar-coated licorice strings.

"How much is that?" Neysa wants to know.

"Ninety-five, \$1.05," he says.

"A dollar five? But I only got a dollar," she says, plaintively.

"So you owe me a nickle, OK?"

"Five cents?"

"How much are you going to bring me tomorrow?"

It's unclear whether Neysa gains any insight about credits and debits in this transaction, but she eagerly exchanges her crumpled dollar bill for the crisp brown goody bag. Marques writes her name in a worn, red notebook under names of 65 others who



Globe staff photo/John Blanding

Richard Marques mixes sales of false teeth and candy in his business on Broadway in Cambridge.

have made similar pledges, and turns to the next customer.

Every Friday Marques tapes a hand-lettered sign in the store window: "This week's winner: Kareem Marshal," reads the latest. To keep his young clients shopping, Marques developed a sales incentive: for every 50 cents kids spend, they get a ticket for the weekly candy lottery. The kids love it.

"After you finish eating all this candy," he tells a kid while bagging his order, "Come back and I'll make you some dentures." "Where's my ticket?" says the kid.

The kids appreciate Marques' bargain sense — he still sells some penny candies for a penny. Mike and Mark, 13-year-old twins, compare All-Bright to Store 24 down the street.

"All-Bright's cheaper," says Mark. "And they've got the best selection of all stuff: subs, candy, posters." Mike interrupts: "And if you don't have money, Dick gives you credit. So if I'm playing basketball and I'm broke, I can still get a drink."

From 8 to 3, Marques makes dentures in his quiet shop. When school is over, kids gather again, and chat with Marques. "Dick" (he lets the kids call him that) asks real questions: "How's school going?" "What's new at home?" "D'you get a haircut?" Like Frank Perdue, or Barry of Jordan's furniture, "Dick" has become a friend who also happens to do business with customers.

Jevell, a 13-year-old with a diamond stud in his left ear, takes time out from showing his new Nikes to four classmates who sport the same style of sneakers: "Dick's a nice guy. He does a lot for us. He talks to us about our problems."

"If you get a D on your report card, you can come here and talk to Dick. He'll say, 'Don't worry about it,' and give you a candy bar to make you feel good. So when you get home, you'll have enough courage to talk to Mom and Dad."

Jevell jumps aside as another group of kids scramble into the store.



City of Cambridge

COUNCILLOR DUEHAY

12.

IN CITY COUNCIL

November 7, 1988

- WHEREAS: Four years ago Richard Marques opened a business entitled "The All-Bright Dental Lab and Novelty Shop" located at 300 Broadway, Cambridge, ostensibly to operate a dental laboratory and ceramic store; and
- WHEREAS: Richard Marques, a dental technician by training, has worked in this field for the past 30 years, as well as having poured the plaster bust of Elvis, Alf and Fonzie; a particular art which the neighborhood children have found exciting; and
- WHEREAS: Although Richard's main talent is making dentures, he has developed a thriving candy store business for the children attending the three Cambridge elementary schools near his store; and
- WHEREAS: Since Richard and his wife have eight children of their own, he is well versed in stocking the shelves with candy the children love; and
- WHEREAS: Richard is helping shape the children's level of responsibility at an early age through his credit system, allowing children small amounts of credit in providing for them to repay him when they get their weekly allowance; and
- WHEREAS: This kind of small business person, who is clearly identified as a neighborhood store and friend of many should not go unrecognized; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED: That this City Council go on record congratulating Richard Marques for his creativity and imagination in dealing with the youth of our City and helping instill in them a sense of humor and responsibility; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the City Clerk be and hereby is requested to forward a suitably engrossed copy of this resolution to Richard Marques on behalf of the entire City Council.

In City Council November 7, 1988.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of 7 members.

Attest:- Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

Joseph E. Connarton
Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

Order #12 S-666

C. Duehay re: resolutions congratulating
Richard Marques for his creativity & imagination
in dealing with the youth of the City.

In City Council,

November 7, 1988

11-7-88

Order Adopted

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