



Mike Greenlar / The Post-Standard

THE GALEVILLE Grocery on Old Liverpool Road is named for a former settlement where salt was harvested.

# 'GALEVILLE' MOURNS LOSS OF ITS 'MAYOR'



**T**he “Mayor of Galeville” is gone.

Bernie Rivers died last week. He was 68.

Bernie, with Frank Alteri, owned Galeville Grocery, at 412 Old Liverpool Road in Salina. The store has a big sign across the front, proclaiming “Galeville.” A bell from the salt works rests at the grocery roof peak, about the only reminder that this used to be one of the places that made Syracuse the “Salt City.” They rang the bell when it started to rain, a signal to pull the covers over the salt blocks.

What is Galeville you might ask?

This is the little settlement that used to be a lot bigger with a different name: Green Point, Salt City, Salt Point and Liverpool R.D. It’s named for Thomas Gale, an Englishman who made a fortune harvesting coarse salt thereabouts. Our last salt works sat right behind the grocery,

which we think was built in 1851. It used to be an office for the Gales.

It’s been a grocery since 1926, when the salt company folded and our reputation for producing salt evaporated. Bernie Rivers took over the business in 1964.

I know Bernie had the name “Mayor of Galeville” because Judith La Manna Rivette told me. Judith is a Syracuse lawyer and author. She and her husband, Ric Rivette, live within spitting distance of Galeville Grocery. They



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**BERNIE RIVERS**, who took over the Galeville Grocery in 1964, died last week at age 68.

often shop there.

Judith wrote me an e-mail about Bernie: “Ric and I had the honor and fun of driving Bernie and his wife, Jean, in the town of Salina Centennial parade last summer in Ric’s 1966 Lincoln convertible, labeled with ‘Mayor of Galeville’ signs. . . . Top hat in hand, Bernie waved at the crowd that all knew him. I daresay that he was more popular than the other dignitaries in the parade. . . .”

“Bernie, Ric always said, knew and kept confident everyone’s vices in the neighborhood, at least as they related to food and groceries. Silently and warmly, he welcomed visits of customers — some of them taken during long commercial television breaks. Those late-night runs to Galeville Grocery (we always called it ‘Bernie’s’) to replenish such necessary supplies as a lottery ticket, smokes and the occasional emergency gallon of vanilla ice cream.

“We used Bernie’s as our pantry, regularly for this or that last-minute food item. It is where we go for our Sunday morning newspaper, always accompanied by conversation and a quip or observation of the day or week past. . . .”

“Bernie was the light of a smile, a needed unrelated perspective if you asked and always a friendly hug. Bernie was 68 and had only been ill a short time, but it was a fast-moving and devastating illness. I will miss him terribly.”

I was welcomed into Bernie’s world back in 1996, when Rob Fain invited me to visit Galeville, where he grew up. The place is unofficial, like Bernie’s title, but goes back at least 150 years to the salt works days. Galeville now has about 1,600 homes; the soul rests at Galeville Grocery.

And, with Bernie Rivers.

## That 15th Ward film

For the folks who missed it, or want to savor it again, Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association, tells me the Black History Preservation Project film, “Syracuse’s 15th Ward and Beyond,” will be shown again at 5:30 p.m. June 23 at the Palace Theatre in Eastwood. There is no admission fee.

Greg says the film, sponsored by Syracuse University and the Gifford Foundation, is the beginning of a program by the Black History Preservation Project to capture oral and photographic material to document the history of the black communities in Syracuse and Onondaga County in order to create a virtual museum about local African American history. A “Digital History Fair” is planned for this fall.

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