

100 hours a week

Working virtually all day, every day, behind a counter always with a ready word and a smile for **customers**, then having to clean up and do the books long into the night. What's the attraction in **owning a shop?** We talk to three families who thrive on being **open all hours**.

Eileen Loo is a gentle, softly spoken lady who shakes her head as she predicts that her husband, Colin, will die with his boots on, overseeing the family business.

The Loos are a remarkable pair of quiet achievers. Both in their 60s, they run the Fruit Centre in the heart of Mt Eden, Auckland, with two of their four adult children, Richard and Glennis, and some help from other staff. Richard's wife works there part-time and their children sometimes tag along in school holidays.

Colin and Eileen's families fled from China to escape war and settled in New Zealand. Family business brought them together when Eileen was 19. "We had a fruit shop in Rotorua and the Loos had a market garden," she explains. They married in 1953 and have been selling produce in Mt Eden ever since.

The shop is open for more than 80 hours a week, from 8am to 8pm daily.

Each family member runs a different division. Glennis is the shop's marketer and florist. Richard runs the wholesale, shipping and corporate side of the operation. Colin is an old-fashioned gentleman who works from 5am to 9pm or later. He puts in at least 100 hours a week. Eileen does the book-keeping and wages and makes sure all customers are attended, the shelves are fully stocked, and the dinner is cooked. Her work begins at 8am and ends about 11pm.

When customers see her working late they often ask, "What on earth are you doing open at this time of night?" And, she adds, they don't see the work she does cleaning up after hours!

After closing, there's shelf stocking and cleaning while Eileen prepares dinner upstairs. Before leaving for the night, the Loos dine together. The round-the-table talk is usually about business.

They like working together, though Eileen says there's a lot of give and take. "When there are disagreements we sort each other out." The boss, Colin, adds the final word: "They have to work under me. I've got the say."

Moulding the family business into a successful venture has been his lifetime's work. He says the greatest benefit is being in a trade that gives job security. "It's a way of life. We don't miss anything. We've just got to take turns."

The one thing Eileen does miss is family holidays together. "It's a big sacrifice, but worthwhile," she says.

– Liz Sheridan



Family ties: Colin and Eileen Loo have been in the fruit and vege business for 40 years. Today, they share the workload at their Mt Eden shop with son Richard and daughter Glennis.