

Stores-within-a-store concept takes off in Bradenton

Bradenton is becoming a hub for a retail industry trend, and you can blame **Wal-Mart** for that.

That's what **R.W. "Kirk" Kirkland** does. Like many people, Kirkland blames the world's biggest retailer for the woes of smaller retailers.

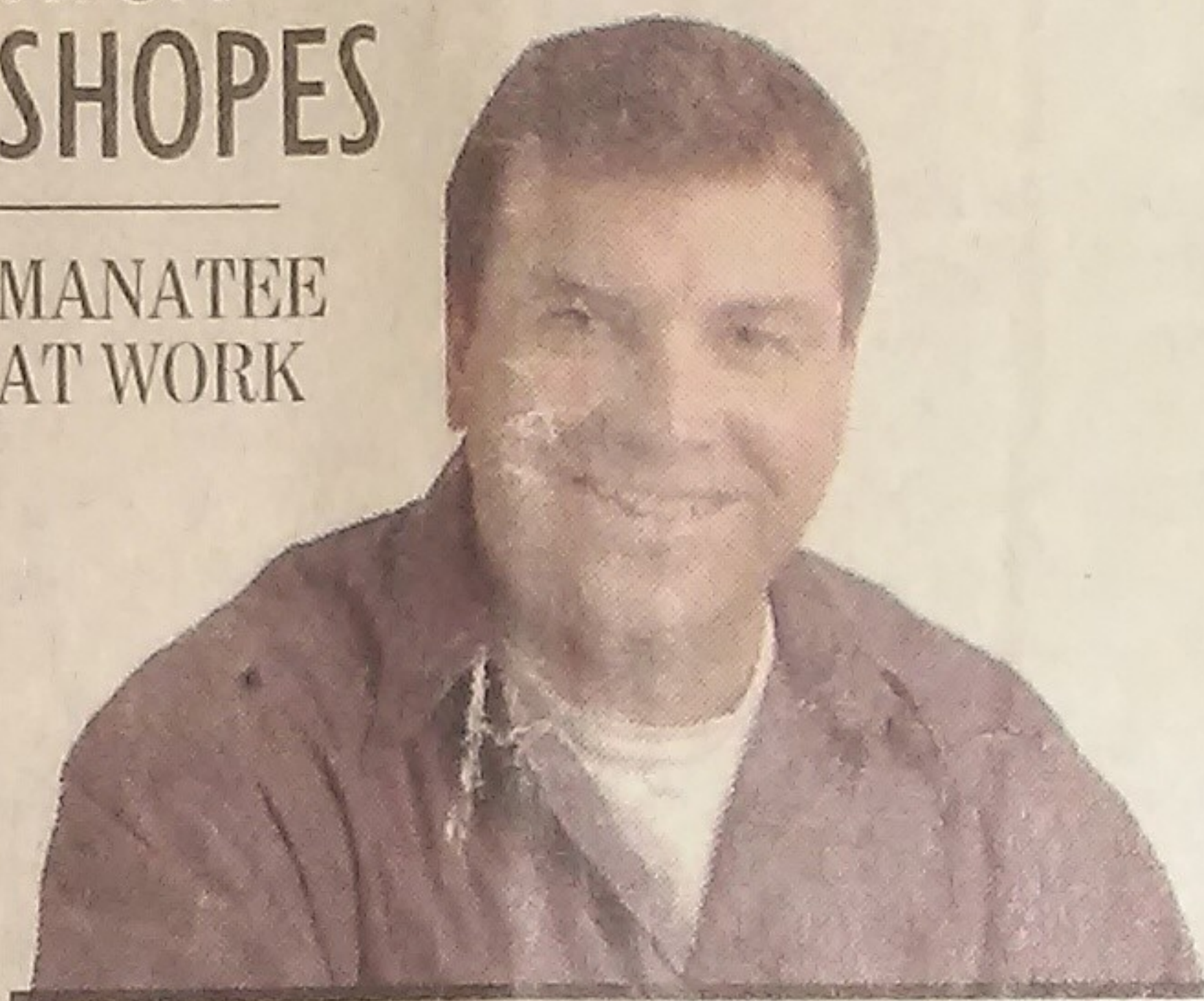
But unlike most Wal-Mart bashers, Kirkland says he has the ammunition to fight back: It's called the stores-within-a-store concept.

Kirkland and business partner **Mike Crouthamel**, a Brandon developer, opened their version of the concept inside the former **Scotty's** at Manatee Avenue and 67th Street West.

They call it **America's Market** and it features dozens of retailers in booths selling items ranging from furniture to children's clothing. A soft opening is scheduled for Wednesday.

RICH SHOPES

MANATEE
AT WORK



The items are new, not used, says Kirkland, and he says he'll help retailers make contacts in the wholesale industry to get them started.

"We're letting independent business people take the amount of space they need and we're not limiting them to take a large space," he says, adding that booths go month-to-month from \$147.50 to \$295, which includes utilities.

Here's where the Wal-Mart connection comes in: Kirkland says he and Crouthamel have enough financial backing to open 500 America's Markets across the Southeast.

He says he wants to target areas where small retailers are being outslugged by "big box" retailers. He picked Bradenton because, among other reasons, it's fighting the Wal-Mart battle. "These stores have put people out of business all over America," he says.

Kirkland's concept is being played out elsewhere. A couple of months ago, **Terry Schneider** opened his **Shoppers Bazaar Mall** at the former **Albertsons** near **DeSoto Square Mall**. Two years earlier, he opened a similar store in North Fort Myers and said the concept was catching on in Kentucky.

It's winning converts partly because renters don't have to man-

age their booths full-time. Landlord-employed cashiers ring up the items and set aside the cash for their tenants. The tenant restocks the shelves.

"All those mom-and-pop stores don't have a way to compete against the big boxes. This is a way to help them out," he said.

DeSears going strong

DeSears isn't having problems generating sales.

In fact, the Bradenton-based appliance chain is set to be recognized today by **Jim Campbell**, president and chief executive of **GE Consumer Products**.

Campbell will present DeSears President **John Rice** with a **Distinguished Dealer Award** for sales of GE appliances.

Rich Shopes can be contacted at 742-6160 or by fax at 742-6169. E-mail him at rich.shopes@heraldtribune.com.