

# Grocery shoppers lose champion

ROBIN COLLUM  
Special to The Journal  
EDMONTON

Max Satanove was passionate about groceries.

Every week for 18 years, Mr. Satanove walked grocery store aisles in search of the city's best food prices, and tallied the results for local shoppers. Mr. Satanove would choose 42 common grocery items and go to stores throughout the city to find out what the major chains were charging that week. The results, "Max's Edmonton Food Basket," ran in the *Edmonton Examiner*.

Mr. Satanove's survey was the only non-governmental price census in the city, and has been credited with helping to keep Edmonton food prices some of the lowest in the country.

"I don't think people realize just how big an impact he had on our quality of life here in terms of grocery prices," said Wendy Armstrong, past president of the Canadian Association of Consumers' Alberta chapter.

"Other people may be skeptical, but there is no doubt in my mind that his work was integral to keeping prices down in Edmonton."

Max Satanove died of pneumonia on Jan. 27, 2009. He was 92.

After serving in the Canadian Air Force in the Second World War, Mr. Satanove entered the grocery business working for his father-in-law at the Alberta Trading Company. He eventually took over the business.

Mr. Satanove sold the store and retired after his 60th birthday, but he couldn't stand being idle for long. His interest in the grocery industry drew him back in, and he started the price survey as a hobby in 1988.

"Keeping busy was really important to him, but he didn't want the stress of running the store," said Mr. Satanove's daughter, Esther Ohayon. "He said, 'I



Max Satanove and his wife, Julie

need something to keep me busy,' and started the food survey."

"This is my thing. It's something I can do, and to a certain extent it's a valuable service," Mr. Satanove said in a 1989 interview.

"I get a kick out of it and I enjoy doing it," he said two years later.

Mr. Satanove would start with a list of possible products. On Sundays, he drove from store to store to make sure the items were available at all the chains, and would pare down that week's list to 42 items.

He made sure to include a selection of meat, produce, dairy, canned food, and dry goods.

Mr. Satanove returned to the same stores on Monday with his pared-down list to recheck the prices, then totalled it all up at home. Early on, the survey was published in *The Journal*, before moving to its eventual home at *The Examiner*.

George Hendy was manager at the Mayfield Save-on-Foods when he became acquainted with Mr. Satanove.

"I don't think there was anyone at the store at the time who didn't know who he was. He was very social and friendly," said Hendy. "And I think his survey was very valuable to people. The retailers certainly paid attention to it. In our store, we looked at it like a scorecard."

"I'm enhancing the competition among retailers, and by doing this Edmonton has some of the lowest food prices in the country," Mr. Satanove said in 2006, a claim consistently borne out in cross-Canada pricing surveys.

"I remember in the mid-'90s, Max would come in to our office shaking his head, saying 'Will you look at this, prices are creeping up again,'" Armstrong said. "So we'd put out a press release, and within 10 days prices would have gone back down."

In 2006, Mr. Satanove earned the Alberta Consumer Champion Award for his work.

But while he was proud of his role in helping keep prices low, he said he wanted his surveys to be an accurate record of the cost of food across the city, not just a discount guide.

"This is not a bargain-finder," he once said. "The price is as I see it every day."

And he hated the word cheap.

"Cheap means inferior, and you don't want to call them, well, inferior groceries," he said.

Mr. Satanove retired his Food Basket in 2006, when he stopped driving. But prices were never far from his mind.

"He was always thinking about it," Ohayon said. "He was so concerned that the prices were going up. He was saying, 'We need someone to go out there and do a survey.'"

Mr. Satanove is survived by his wife Julie, his children Larry, Esther and Tom, and his six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.