

*Stable Faith Men's Collection Season 3*  
*by Tylan Harris Fall Winter 2023*  
*'Labor, Love, Religion'*  
*November 2023.*

So, I want to use this as an opportunity to talk a little more about the design philosophy behind this body of work. I guess we can first start with vases. About 2 years ago I became super obsessed with the work of Chicago based artist Theaster Gates. He's a trained potter turned fine artist. When looking for inspiration I get as far away from fashion as possible. 1) so I don't wind up looking like someone else and 2) because fashion is honestly so boring. Keeping with my thesis, I find the most interesting thing we can do as creators is make with our hands (see: my first collection: Father, Country, Me 2021.)

Anyway, my obsession with pottery and vases pointed me towards some of the world's oldest vases from Ancient Greece. I suppose with the imminent collapse of their society on the horizon, the artist of the time was able to have the wherewithal to depict their way of life to human beings hundreds and sometimes thousands of years into the future. For some civilizations – this is the only evidence they ever existed.

Who doesn't love Percy Jackson? At the Inkster Public Library, I found my first copy and began to read in the fourth grade. I wasn't big on escapism but if you asked me then I swear I thought I was a demigod too. I spent hours immersing myself in Greek terminology and imagery as a boy. Today that library no longer exists.

Most the town I remember from my childhood is a distant memory, swept away by the current of globalization, we've

overcorrected and find ourselves without real neighborhood or community. So, with my found-again love for ancient pottery, I decided to start digging the one place I know intimately and see what I could uncover.

The \*Old\* Inkster Public Library was located on the other side of Michigan Avenue and Inkster Road on the North Side of the street. The design of the building was something out of National Treasure. What I would later find out was one of the country's first round libraries, its unassuming ground level façade led into a circular shape atrium wrapped like a screw leading readers deeper underground. Covered in floor-to-ceiling windows and built on hill overlooking a forest and a river, the library was my earliest introduction into architecture.

My mother and grandmother took my brother and I here on many occasions. Before Percy Jackson, it was mostly manga. We would scour the shelves looking for early Yu-Gi-Oh volumes. We would find the books and start them from the beginning day after day because we had no way of remembering where we left off. I think it was a while before we realized you're meant to read manga backwards.

The library was permanently closed in 2018 due to city budget cuts leading to severe building problems. Architect Kael Nelson who moved from New York to Inkster to design the building in 1960, considered it the greatest work of his career.



In the Summertime, my grandmother would send me and my cousins to the local liquor store all the time on errands, usually for orange pop while we played outside. There was no crosswalk on this section of Inkster Road, so we would run as fast as we could across the street, dodging traffic and stray dogs alike.

The store had this old school pink awning against this blue concrete that lined the building. Older men would hang around outside in the parking lot and although I was almost always nervous, they never bothered any of us. Later I learned they were the overflow from the strip club next door.

In Present Day, I wanted to research more about the building itself. Market Foods Liquor used to be under the name Allen's Super Market, named by the original owners Lafayette Allen Sr and Edith Allen. A black family in suburban Inkster, they initially got their start in 1932 after converting their living room into a small neighbor convenience store. It wasn't until 1954 they had saved enough money to open their first store, the very same store me and my cousins would split \$10 for Orange Crush pop and snacks. The old signage out front pictured below became the inspiration for our Check Cashing wallet. You can read more about the Allen's Super Market in this "The Food Dealer" article from 1966. [\[HERE\]](#)

In 2020, the original building returned under black ownership. The "New" Allen B&D Market still supplies groceries to the community today.





# THE FOOD DEALER

The Magazine of The Greater Detroit Food Market

FEBRUARY, 1966



Lafayette Allen Jr., left, and Senior ponder the future.

## Allen's: A Family Success Story

It was back in 1932 when Lafayette Allen Sr. and his wife, Edith, founded their first supermarket on Alford street in Inkster by converting the living room and front of their home into a small but convenient corner grocery store. Today, the Allen family operates two stores, one each in Inkster and Ypsilanti, doing a

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## Allen's- A Family Success Story



JESSE ALLEN, left, is about to present a winning customer with her prize turkey at Allen's Super Market's annual "Turkey Give-away."

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combined sales volume of around \$1½ million annually.

Prior to converting his home into a store, the senior Allen used to peddle produce and limited food products on a door-to-door basis in suburban Inkster where he became one of the pioneer citizens, and is today a well-respected businessman.

In 1938, Lafayette and Edith moved the business into their first actual store building, located next door to the Allen residence. The building measured 40 x 60 feet, but was suitable for doing business at this time.

Then, some 16 years later, the Allens moved to a still larger location at 3760 Inkster Road, site of their present Inkster store, and main office. It wasn't until 1962, however, that they opened their second store, this one in Ypsilanti, at 510 South Huron Drive.

Allen's Super Markets have long been members of the Associated Food Dealers, where Lafayette Jr. serves as an active member of our board of directors.

As we said, it is a family-run operation. Lafayette Sr., 64, is still active in the business as president of the corporation. His wife, Edith, 63, is vice-president. Sons Jesse, 41, and Lafayette Jr., 44, are also vice-presidents.

The successful family board of directors includes sons David, 34, and Lawrence, 26; daughters Mrs. Francis Butler, 36, and Mrs. Betty Leverette, 32; and Junior's sons, Richard, 23, and Lafayette III, 25.

One of the main reasons for the success of Allen's is involvement in the communities where they do business, the senior Allen says. "We are active contributors to the various churches in our areas, regardless of denomination, and make donations to various worthwhile chari-

ties, as the Boy Scouts," he continued. "We hold many contests throughout the year offering valuable prizes of free food products, whichever the winner prefers. A retailer today must communicate with his public."

According to Lafayette Jr., the grocer must continue to be competitive. "Buying today for us is still a major concern. We still purchase many of our products directly, while our trucks will pick up produce and merchandise direct from terminals and wholesalers.

"If you buy right," he continued, "you can sell right. A penny saved here and there can and should be passed on to customers in the form of lower prices."

"Our customers have always come first," the junior Allen relates. We have always tried to give them what they desired. Our specialties are meat and produce, and our produce is ALWAYS priced lower than any of the chain stores."

Allen's Super Markets is the "world's largest Negro-owned food store operation." The family has been written up numerous times in leading national Negro magazines, which includes Ebony and Jet, as well as locally in newspapers circulated in Detroit (The Detroit Courier), and Michigan (The Michigan Chronicle).

The Allens are in the process of finalizing plans for a third store, to open sometime soon, but they won't say where.

"Today, a grocer cannot 'go it alone,'" says Lafayette Jr. "The smart grocer or beverage store operator must affiliate with a solid trade association, such as our own AFD, because when all grocers unite for the cause of justice and fair play their voices will be heard."

We'll add our Amen to that!





community oriented. The deacons there became father figures to me. One day, they arrived at my grandmother's doorstep to deliver news to her; her daughter, my aunt, had passed away. They stayed with her all-night consoling her and some years later when my grandmother passed away, they were there to cover my mother in the Word.

The church was where I discovered ministry. It's also where I developed my love for gospel music, I was even in the choir. One thing the mothers knew how to do every Sunday was give thanks unto the Lord.

On Sunday mornings, my grandmother would make sure everybody got up earlier enough to go to church. We attended a neighborhood church that was walking distance from her house until we found a new church home down Inkster Road towards Cherry Hill. I've probably spent more time within New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church than I spent living in my childhood home. Sunday Service, Children's Church, Bible Study, Vacation Bible School, you name it – my grandmother made sure the kids of the family were in attendance.

I didn't have a huge problem with this. Nowadays I look back with fondness on my time growing up in the church. I had church friends that I was excited to see every week. It felt like an extension of my grandmother's house, family oriented,



Inkster High School is the only school within the city of Inkster. The school district has been in debt for years, accruing operating debt of just under \$13 million going into the 2012-2013 school year. Enrollment was down with the student body decreasing from 1500 to just over 900 students between 2011 to 2012.

That Summer In 2013, Under House Bill 4813; the newly ratified Public Act 96 allowed the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction and Treasurer to dissolve local school districts not deemed “financially viable.”

State Representative David Knezek called the proposed closing of the school district “unconscionable”, requesting that the Michigan Attorney General determine if the Bill was legal within the bounds of the Michigan Constitution.

After the law was passed, the school district was closed permanently in the spring of 2013 and in 2015, the buildings were demolished with the remaining 940 students being divided between the four neighboring school districts.

