Some businesses have existed in Wildwood for many years....some two generations, some three generations and a few even longer. Silen’s Department Store has been in business in the same family and in the same location, for four generations.

In 1902, John Silen was operating a marine supply business in the Port Richmond section of Philadelphia where he sold everything from fishing rods to boats. He wanted to move to the shore area to open the same type of business. In 1911, he purchased a lot in Holly Beach on Pacific Avenue between Hand and Leaming Avenues where the store is still located. It was fairly close to the beach then and off the beaten track which John liked. A small building was constructed on the property in 1913. By 1919, John and his wife, Selma, moved to Wildwood into a second floor apartment above the store and operated the marine business.

Their oldest daughter Lily (Lillian) was working in the store also. Helen, their youngest daughter, became a school teacher and married K.T. Johansen. Lily, married Arne Rasmussen, a Merchant Marine. In the 1930’s, Lily and Arne took over the Silen’s store. Their son, Keith, was born in the apartment over the store, where they lived. Now, only offices are above the store.

Keith participated in football in Wildwood and was nominated to the all-star grid team. After graduating from Wildwood High, Keith attended Wilkes College where he majored in business, and also met his wife, Patricia. While at Wilkes, he took a part-time job at the Kinney shoe store in Wilkes-Barre.

After college, Barry and Pat came back to Wildwood. He came back to work in Silen’s and Pat worked for the Cape May County Welfare Board. Now they work in the store...full time for both. They spend the fall attending trade shows, shopping for merchandise for the following summer, and then as the merchandise is delivered, they spend time ticketing every thing and then the season begins and they are busy with customers.

While their two sons chose not to work in the store, they preferred being summer lifeguards instead. They both met their wives, who are both teachers, on the beach. Their son Dan became a financial analyst and lives in Flemington, NJ. Their son, Jim, is a teacher in Keyport, and continues to spend his summers on the Wildwood Crest Beach Patrol.

The location of the store worked out well for Silen’s. Pacific Avenue became a well-traveled street in the summers. Part of the large lot that John Silen purchased in 1911, is now welcome as a parking lot.

Recently a woman came in the store to shop and she happily claimed to have found a special bathing suit in Silen’s every year for the past 80 years! Now that is a satisfied customer!

**BLUEBERRY BUCKLE**

Pat Rasmussen makes this when guests are expected. It is a good breakfast cake and also good as a dessert, served warm with ice cream.

1/4 c butter  
3/4 c sugar  
1 egg  
2 c flour  
2 tsp. baking powder  
1/4 tsp. salt  
3/4 c milk  
1 tsp. vanilla  
2 c blueberries

**TOPPING:** Mix together with your hands until crumbly

1/4 c butter  
1/2 c sugar  
1/3 c flour  
2 egg

Cream butter, add sugar then egg. Add dry ingredients alternately with the milk and vanilla to the butter mixture. Batter will be stiff. Fold in the blueberries then pour into a 9x13 greased pan. Sprinkle with the topping and bake in a 375 oven for about 35 minutes.

Thank you to Barry and Pat Rasmussen, and the Wildwood Historical Museum for helping with this article. The ads are from the collection of Dave and Theresa Williams. The 1960 photo of Silen’s was featured in a story in The Sun on the history of Bowman’s Cooling & Heating.