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**STORE OF
THE YEAR 2018**



Rocky Catanese closed his Cohuna fruit and vegetable shop after 26 years last month but is still supplying fresh produce to local businesses from his Gunbower market garden.

Despite closing shop, Rocky still producing

JENNY DENTON

ROCKY Catanese closed the doors last month on the fruit and vegetable shop he had been running in Cohuna for 26 years.

"It's going to be sad because we're leaving a lot of friends behind that I see daily. And it's been a good business, really good. I'm just tired," the 62-year-old said.

"The customers understand. They say they don't like it but they understand."

Twice a week on market days Rocky would leave home in Gunbower at 7am, work all day in the Cohuna shop then drive to Melbourne and work through the night buying produce at the wholesale market.

"I love the market. Like in the shop, I've got a lot of beautiful friends there - all different characters of different shapes and sizes and different nationalities. I've been going to the market for 42 years. I was a young boy when I started."

In 1976 when his parents, Frank and Rose, opened a fruit and vegetable shop in Pyramid Hill, Rocky, who was already growing vegetables at home, started helping Frank with his run, and after a few years moved into wholesaling.

In August 1992 he and his wife Trish opened in Cohuna, having bought the florist shop in Market St, which they closed down and converted.

Six years later he took the opportunity of bigger premises and a prime position at 71

King George St, where over two decades, he and his shop became a local institution.

"When we opened, Trish and I had two daughters - Samantha, who was 2, and Casey, who was 4, who went to preschool in Cohuna," Rocky said.

"In 1994 we had the twins, Ali and Paige. The four girls grew up in the shop. We've got pictures of them in boxes and sleeping on benches. They helped run it too, and they've all got good jobs now. Working in the shop taught them to talk to people, be courteous and polite and help people with whatever they need."

"Cohuna's a very friendly town. Very family oriented, very social. People just come in for a yarn," he said.

"People bring me cakes and scones. I'll miss it. I'll miss all of them, especially the kids. I've seen a lot of them arrive and grow up."

His younger customers always appreciated his fruit-based snack bars, he says, most of which he gave away.

"To this day I still have 25-year-olds asking, 'Where are the Rocky bars?'"

While he hopes to be able to rest, go fishing and have more time for family and friends, Rocky's not about to retire just yet.

He's still growing vegetables at Gunbower, buying at the market and supplying fresh produce to businesses around the district.

"It's constant. You've got to be on top of it all the time, got to buy it right. You've got to have freshness and quality!" he said.

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