

LUNCH COUNTERS INTEGRATED HERE

Voluntary Move Launched Today By Two Stores

BY JO SPIVEY

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Greensboro, where lunch counter sit-in demonstrations were started by Negro students Feb. 1 and spread to other cities of the South, broke with segregated service early this afternoon as Woolworth and Kress stores opened their lunch counters to Negro customers on a sit-down basis.

The departure from previous company policies was a voluntary action on part of the firms involved and the result of a number of conferences between store officials and members of the Greensboro Citizens Assn., a group of business and professional leaders from the Negro community. Previously the two firms had sold Negroes merchandise at counters elsewhere in the store but had denied them sit-down service at lunch counters.

The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Community Relations, which failed to effect an agreement on the sit-in problem following a month of negotiations in the spring, served in an advisory capacity during recent discussions.

Thus Greensboro, which experienced intensive picketing of stores in the two months after negotiations broke down April 1 and intermittent picketing since colleges closed for the summer vacation, became the third city in North Carolina to break with tradition and serve Negroes on the same basis as whites at lunch counters. Winston-Salem was the first city in the state to begin integration of lunch counters several weeks ago. Charlotte followed earlier this month.

Dr. Hobart Jarrett, president of the Greensboro Citizens Assn., commenting on the action by the stores, said, "We are pleased to have had the opportunity to work co-operatively with the mayor's committee and the operators on this matter which is so significant to our city. We appreciate the good manner in which the agreement was reached."

Integration of lunch counters was accomplished without prior publicity. Small groups from the Negro community went to the stores about 2 p. m., were seated at counters, requested service, received it, ate and left.

Although only two firms were involved in today's activity, possibility was seen that other stores in the city, which serve Negroes at other counters, would follow the lead of the pioneering firms and open their food-serving counters to Negroes before fall.

Integration of counters came less than three weeks before trial of 45 students from A&T College, including two white girls from Bennett, in Guilford Superior Court on charges of trespassing at Kress store. The charges were brought April 22 at the height of activity on part of students after mayor's committee negotiations failed.

With the exception of brief picketing in shopping centers, activities were confined to the downtown area.

The voluntary action of part of the two Greensboro firms was expected to forestall resumption of picketing activities by students when they return to campuses here in the fall.

Also expressing satisfaction that the agreement had been reached, E. R. Zano, chairman of the mayor's committee, said,

"The problem has been purely a moral and economic one, since no legal basis exists for requiring these private business to serve anyone other than those they choose."

"It has been my observation that the patient and persistent recognition of the situation has permitted individual analysis of the issues by both operators and students. To a commendable extent the events of today and tomorrow therefore will not be the unthinking reflection of slogans and precast concepts but will be the honest attempts of individuals to act according to the finest that is within them. Greensboro citizens can be counted on to accept with tolerance and to understand actions taken in such a spirit."

Although sit-in demonstrations started in Greensboro, the city has not experienced the violence which has occurred in other cities of the South to which the move spread.

The sit-ins began Monday afternoon, Feb. 1, as four A&T youths requested lunch-counter service at Woolworth in the 100 block of South Elm Street and were denied. Their number increased, students returned the next day. By mid-week the sit-ins spread to Kress in the 200 block of South Elm Street. A number of white youths also had appeared on the scene to heckle the Negro groups.

Woolworth and Kress closed their stores Feb. 8 as the situation reached a critical point. Students agreed to a two-week "cooling off" period, at the conclusion of which they expressed willingness to submit to negotiation their contentions that they should receive the same service at lunch counters as white patrons if they were sold goods at other counters of the stores.

Shortly thereafter stores reopened their lunch counters but, in line with their agreement, students did not resume their sit-downs. A week after the agreement, Mayor George H. Roach appointed his committee, made up of three representatives each from city council, chamber of commerce and merchants association.

After more than a month of conferences held by the committee with heads of stores having lunch counters and other merchandise counters and with student and other Negro leaders, the committee announced that no agreement could be reached.

Picketing by A&T and Bennett College students began immediately with white youths setting up lines to picket the Negroes. Woolworth closed its counter again and used it for display of merchandise. Kress also closed for a brief period but reopened with a chain across the entry to the luncheonette area. Woolworth resumed use of its lunch counter in early May.