

# AWARD FOR MEON VALLEY COUPLE



Frank and Jenny Wheeler proudly show their award.

Photo: Petersfield Herald

A national magazine has honoured the owners of one of the country's most picturesque village stores and sub post offices.

Subpostmaster Frank Wheeler and his wife Jenny, who run the East Meon Post Office and The Riverside Shop in the Meon Valley in Hampshire, have received the Nation of Shopkeepers' Award from the quarterly magazine Evergreen.

Customers and readers nominated them for the award for their friendly and personal service. The accolade also recognises the office and shop as being establishments where the "traditional style" of the premises had been maintained to a high degree.

Frank also keeps historic records of all families from around the area so visitors can trace family trees.

The couple, who have run the post office for nearly five years, are delighted with the award and have put it on display in the office that is housed

in a 13th century thatched cottage.

But, in common with many other rural subpostmasters and small retailers, it has been an uphill battle for them to make ends meet.

"We'll keep going as long as we can," said Frank. "But with a population of only 900 and another shop to make a living from the area times aren't exactly easy. The fact is, we simply need more custom in order to survive."

Like other village sub post offices and stores they provide a valuable community lifeline and would be sorely missed if they left.

One of their customers is John Cole, of nearby Waterlooville, who paid credit to the couple's perseverance. He said the village would probably have lost its post office and store if the Wheelers had not been determined to make a go of it.

"I think their courage deserves all the support it can get," he said.