SERIES PITCH

Gessler's

One-hour serialized drama

A family comes to America looking for an ordinary life.

A neighborhood store in a decaying river town makes that impossible.

CREATED BY: William W Dilks Sr.

Penns Ferry has been trying to die for decades, but never quite makes it

In a town of one square mile and 5,000 people, a bypass pulled traffic away. Industry declined, yet people stayed.

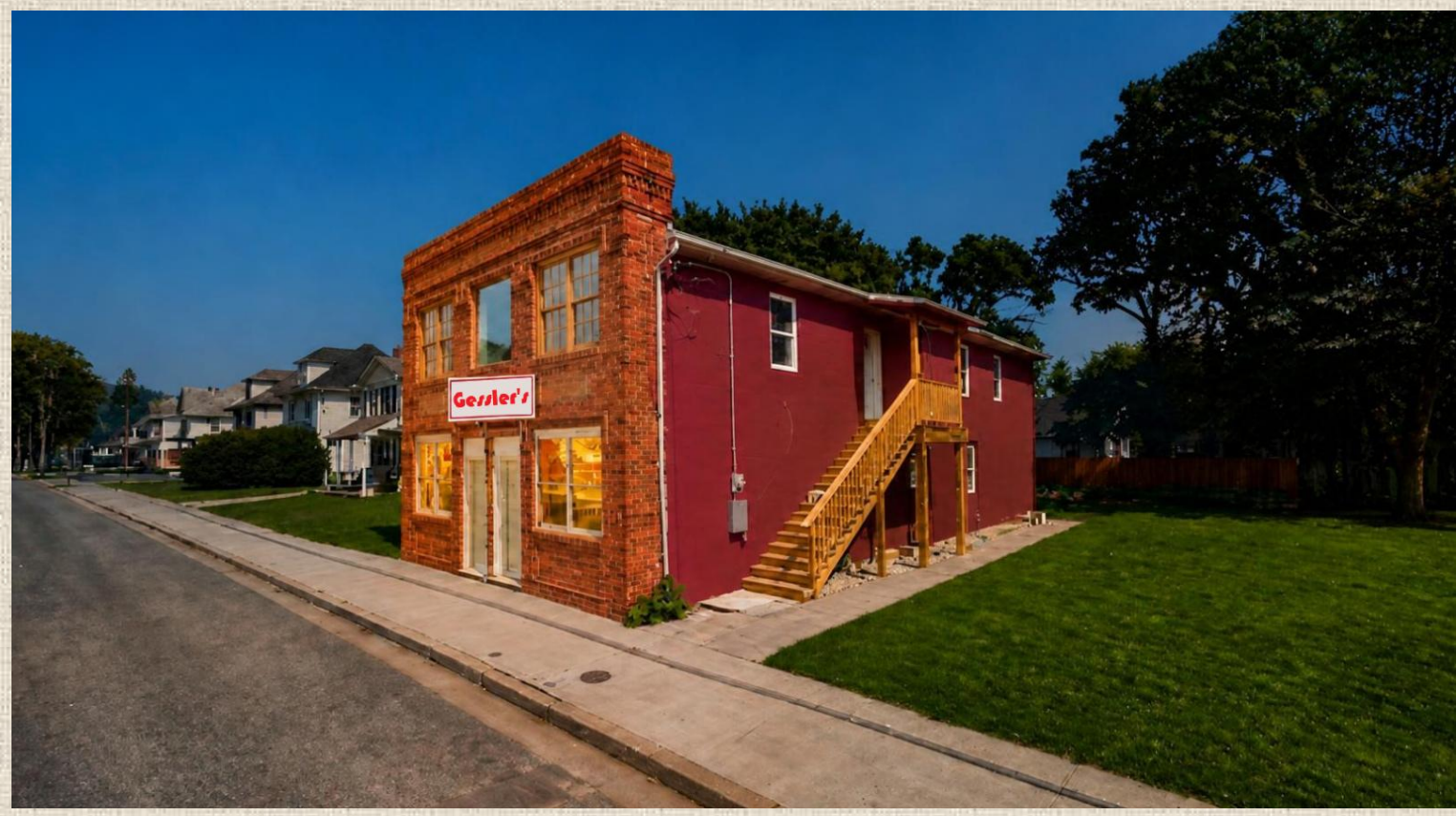
Penns Ferry survives through schools, churches, family businesses, old grudges and residents who know one another's history.

It's more than a setting. It's a continuing feeling that never lets go.

A decaying S Broad St in Penns Ferry

Vincenzo wants one home and a place for his family

Yet what looks like a modest foothold exposes Vincenzo to the town's friendships, obligations, petty officials, corruption and criminal under-currents, and people whose real power is not immediately visible.



Everyone eventually passes through Gessler's

THE EMOTIONAL CENTER

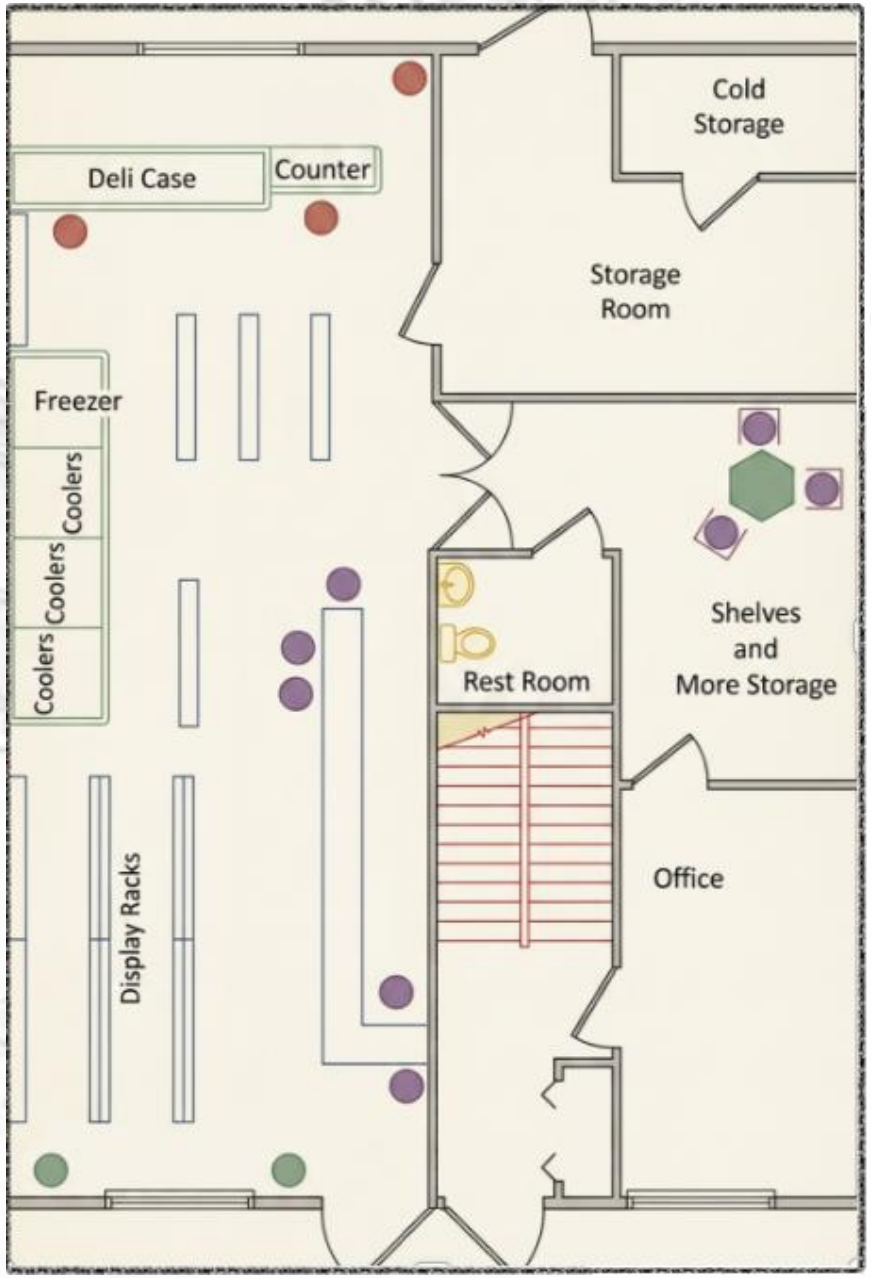
An old neighborhood store with an apartment upstairs, a deli in back and an office, where the town's daily life unfolds through overlapping relationships, conflicts and smaller interwoven stories.

Ordinary needs

Milk, eggs, bread, cigars, coffee, hot dogs and forgotten necessities.

A local reputation

Franks 'sangwiches' overflow with meat and cheese and create a line at lunch time.



The Romano Family, Sicily.

Older photo taken in Sicily 6 years earlier

Vincenzo Romano

Thirty-one. Quiet, intelligent and physically capable. He acts only when he believes action is necessary. Restraint is first mistaken for weakness, later for strength.

Serafina Romano

Twenty-nine. Strategically gifted, socially perceptive and never just the protective man's wife. She helps the family become part of Penns Ferry rather than remain outsiders.

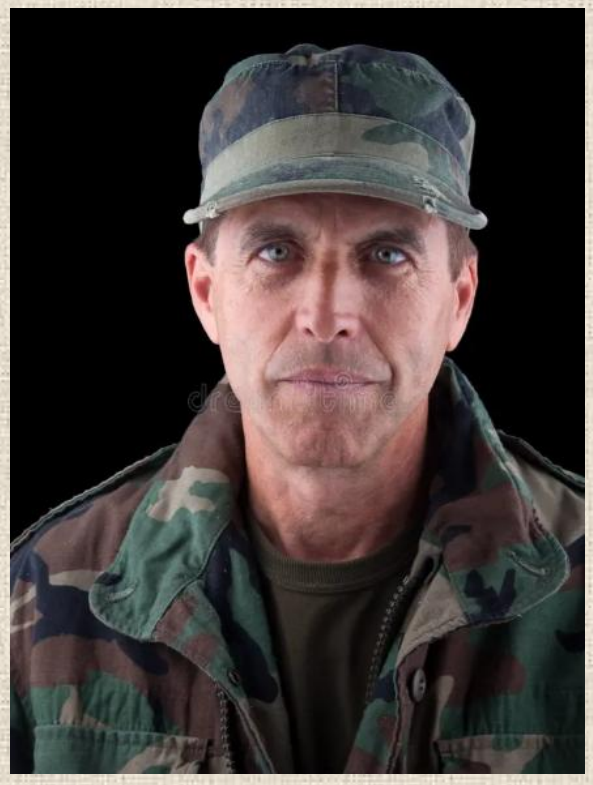
Maria and Rosario

Now 8 and 10

They share complete love, trust and respect, even when they read danger differently.

Frank gives Vincenzo a foothold. Soapy teaches him what lies beneath it

Frank The worn-out owner of Gessler's and Vincenzo's first guide to ordinary American life. He sells the store to Vincenzo and leaves for Florida, yet remains present in the town's memory.



Soapy

A seemingly marginal town figure whose restraint is choice, not helplessness. He becomes Vincenzo's guarded confidant and eventual partner.

"A little violence never hurt nobody".

Penns Ferry's characters carry their own histories

Jimmy & Nate

A neighborhood boy age 16 and top high school athlete grows up around Gessler's. His observant father age 51 has served the county's wealthiest household for thirty years and hears everything.

Grandma

Donna Sara di Falco is the 90-year-old force with an attitude still behind di Falco's, aka MeatBalls. She rarely laughs, dislikes Frank's Swedish meatballs and reacts to Vincenzo as though she has seen a ghost.

Archibald "*Chubby*" Tinderboffen

Age 36. Petty town code inspector who mistakes authority for stature. His resentment, prejudice and appetite for credit eventually carry him into politics.

Michele & Grazia Cannavò

The farm family, early 40's, who becomes the Romanos' first American connection and helps transform an accidental arrival into belonging.

Other Penns Ferry players add more depth

Anthony Maconi Sr.

Married. Age 62. Tony is independent, reasonably intelligent but work-based. An outgoing, happy guy focused on keeping his PIZZA PALACE business profitable. Curses a bit in Italian, nothing hidden or complicated about this man.

Anthony "Boney" Maconi Jr.

Single. Age 43. Local h/s football coach. Helps his father at the pizza shop when needed. No one knows what else he does, but they have their suspicions. Makes occasional trips to South Philly and NYC. Nicknamed to differentiate him from his father.

Domenic Bolivar Buckner 'Buck' Ironside

Single. Age 38. A local, hard-ass, rock-solid six-footer who has always felt the need to try to live up to that name. Assistant h/s football coach. Buck is aggressive. Wants the h/s head coaching position. Feels he can do better. Owns a gas station/repair shop.

Maxine Healy – aka 'Rax'

Single. Age 30 looks 20. Strikingly attractive, voluptuous and sexy dark-haired maven. Keyboarding teacher at Penns Ferry High. Fully aware of the attention she receives and why. Interested in both Boney and Buck.

An ordinary life becomes the center of a town

LOGLINE

In a small South Jersey river town that has been trying to die for decades, a naïve yet formidable Sicilian immigrant acquires a neighborhood store to secure an ordinary life for his family, only to become entangled in the loyalties, petty corruption and hidden economy keeping the town alive.

The dying downtown intersection of Broad St and Main St in Penns Ferry.

Everyday problems reveal who truly controls the town

THE REPEATING ENGINE

01

Ordinary life

Family, customers, food, work and the pleasures of belonging.

02

A local pressure

A delivery problem, petty official, gambling debt or threat to someone nearby.

03

Vincenzo chooses

Act, wait or ignore without announcing what he knows.

04

The town changes

Relationships deepen, hidden power becomes visible, and consequences carry forward.

Warmth and danger occupy the same street

Top: Gessler's as it actually looks today.

Bottom: A block from the river on W Main St, an old and decaying bank and hardware store.

Top: W Main St in decay, showing the old, closed Kenner Hotel and Bar.

Bottom: The old Penns Ferry wharf.

Character first

Family, friendship and town life create attachment before larger danger arrives.

Understatement

Behavior over explanation, and consequence over spectacle. Violence is rare and meaningful.

Sideways humor

The humor comes from personality, familiarity, food and old rivalries, not joke plots.

Slow-burn crime

The criminal story emerges through local pressures in a dying town until the larger structure can no longer be ignored.

Season One turns an accidental arrival into a chosen home

ARRIVAL

A plan collapses

The New York arrangement fails. The Cannavò farm and Penns Ferry offer an unexpected alternative.

FOOTHOLD

Gessler's changes hands

Frank hires Vincenzo, learns to trust him and ultimately sells him the store and building.

THE COST

Unfinished business

Frank's local sports book becomes Vincenzo's problem. He settles it, burns the ledger and discovers that ordinary life has consequences.

The world widens, but Gessler's remains home

Season Two — pressure becomes public

A bread-delivery scheme, a street fair, a growing drug problem and Chubby's political ambition draw Vincenzo deeper into Penns Ferry's unofficial systems.

Season Three — the hidden map

The Hammarstrom network becomes visible. Nate is endangered, Soapy must choose a side and Vincenzo confronts power beyond the town's petty corruption.

Season Four — reluctant expansion

Vincenzo's interests widen into businesses and property. Access, not conquest, brings opportunity, responsibility and new threats.

Season Five — what to keep

Having achieved more than he intended, Vincenzo considers what can be sold, what must be protected and why Gessler's is never just another asset.

This is not the rise of a man seeking an empire

It is the story of a man trying to build an ordinary life who repeatedly discovers that protecting it requires him to understand, and sometimes confront, the people and systems surrounding it.

An immigrant story

Arrival becomes participation, ownership and belonging without instant assimilation.

A hidden story underneath

Danger grows out of ordinary obligations rather than replacing the human life above it.

A town ensemble

Recurring characters matter because their relationships accumulate over years. The old-timers hang at the downtown Social Club, where old tensions, rivalries and racial attitudes from the stupidity of youth have grown into a constant flow of off-beat humor and ball-busting. The Social Club is a strong vehicle for cameos.

Gessler's

“A place to get what you forgot someplace else.”

Penns Ferry has been trying to die for decades, but never quite makes it.

CREATED BY William W. Dilks Sr.