

# Toast of the capital

## Merchant tries to keep spirits high

The Adams-Morgan section of the city where Harry Siegel's Ace Beverage Company is located has gone from 1930s elegance to 1960s decline to 1980s moderate affluence. But the fluctuating fortunes of the neighborhood have never stopped society matrons, embassies, legislators or presidents from patronizing the compact storefront shop.

For more than 40 years, Siegel has been the pre-eminent wine merchant to the nation's movers and shakers. With the onset of the holiday season, he's busier than ever.

He provides wines to more than half the embassies here and has helped select the American wines that go to U.S. embassies abroad. His clients include former Ambassador Averell Harriman, author Herman Wouk and, once, Frank Sinatra.

Siegel also provided wines for the tables of President Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter and John Kennedy.

"We'd deliver 25 or more cases of wine a week," said Siegel, recalling Jacqueline Kennedy's fondness for serving Ladoucette's Pouilly Fume at dinner parties when Kennedy was a senator.

Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt, also was a longtime client before she died in 1980.



By Tim Dillon

**WINE SELLER:** Harry Siegel, proprietor of Ace Beverage Co., sold wine to then-Jacqueline Kennedy and Herman Wouk.

## WASHINGTON SCENE

By KAREN DE WITT

Indeed, Mrs. Longworth was the catalyst to getting many of the city's power-brokers to buy their wines from Siegel.

"She used to drop in and ask me if there was some person or other who I wanted as a customer," recalled Siegel. "Within a week or two, that person would show up, sometimes brought in by Mrs. Longworth herself."

But a word-of-mouth recommendation is nothing unless product and service live up to it.

Regardless of inconvenience, Siegel is willing to go

out of his way to make sure dinner parties and receptions go off without a hitch.

On the eve of the Kennedy inauguration, for example, Siegel had a champagne order for a dinner party that *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham was hosting for Vice President Lyndon Johnson. The streets were covered with four-foot drifts of snow. Though it took Siegel and his workers four hours of driving up onto sidewalks and around stranded vehicles before they covered the 15-block distance, he delivered.

"Oh, I've been to some of the finest parties in Washington," joked Siegel. "In spirit, if not in body."