

# Centreport milk haulers near 3rd decade

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CENTERPORT — A public notice was printed in the local paper in July, 1965: "Notice is hereby given that application will be made to the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by Paul S. Phillips, John H. Jacoby, Nicholas J. Kopicz, Rufus Z. Bashore, John E. Yoder, .... for the charter of an intended cooperative agricultural association to be known as the Centreport Milk Hauling Cooperative."

It was a modest beginning back then and one that took a lot of thought by those five Centre Township dairymen. But, with their stoic determination accompanying a handful of shippers and three can trucks in the beginning, these five men have watched their little co-op grow to 100 members and seven modern tank trucks, hauling over 76 million pounds of milk in 1983.

"It snowballed," explained Rufus Bashore on the eve of the 19th annual meeting of the cooperative.

"All of a sudden he quit," (meaning the previous hauler) Bashore said.

The newly-formed co-op had to pick up milk sooner than it had planned since the previous hauler was very upset with the new organization being formed and "dropped us like a hot potato."

Not liking some of the new regulations of the hauler, dairymen had been having problems with him—one of the

reasons behind the new cooperative. At that time, milk was still shipped in cans.

It was back-breaking work, lifting those cans in and out of coolers and in and out of trucks, remembers Paul Phillips. One of the new regulations facing the dairymen was to have the cans out of the cooler waiting to be picked up by the hauler. Although this was much easier on the hauler, it resulted in warm milk and higher bacteria counts. Cans were left at farms and disputes with the hauler became common.

"We decided then we were going to form a co-op," Bashore said.

Paul Phillips was one of the first advocates of the co-op. "We had meetings and meetings and meetings," Phillips stated. "A lot of these guys were skeptical, but we were determined to haul our own milk."

These five dairymen were able to recruit neighbors and friends from the Centreport-Mohrsville area for a charter membership of 35 producers. With a \$25.00 membership fee, three can trucks were purchased and drivers hired. The first membership meeting was held on August 12, 1965 and the five initial dairymen made up the board of directors and officers. All members shipped to Lehigh Valley Dairy and were from Centre and Penn Townships.

"We had rough sailing for the first couple of years," Phillips stated. "We did a log of running around." The directors looked at trucks, toured dairy plants, and drove the trucks themselves when



Current officers and members of the board of directors of the Centreport Co-op include, from the left, Nicholas Kopicz, John Jacoby, Donald Landis, Richard Hoffman, Willard Stauffer and John Krall.

there were problems.

From July to September that first year, 4,044,177 pounds of milk were hauled to Lehigh. The first full year in business, 1966, showed 6,049 tons of milk hauled to the dairy. Members were assessed per hundredweight, as they are today.

"The directors felt as long as we could meet our expenses, we weren't out to make a profit," John Jacoby explained. Milk pickups were tallied and members were charged what was needed for expenses.

Even with the low hauling charges, Centreport Milk Hauling Cooperative purchased its first bulk tank truck in April, 1966 and began bulk pickup.

"At first," Phillips explained, "we had so little milk, they couldn't take a sample."

In June, 1968, the dairy stopped accepting cans. Although some members discontinued dairying because they did not want to install a bulk tank, and membership sank to 30, the Centreport co-op continued to haul milk for 24 cents to 26 cents a hundredweight. A second tanker was added in 1969, third and fourth in 1978, the fifth in 1979, the sixth in 1982, and the seventh added in November of 1983.

"The big boom in membership came in 1976," Jacoby stated. He remembers someone saying at a meeting: "if Centreport could haul milk for 30 cents, why can't the others?" Centreport was hauling for six to eight cents below the other haulers, paying all their bills, and increasing their assets to the full advantage of its members.

More producers joined in 1979



Roy Hetrick, left, director with Lehigh Valley Cooperative; and Bernard Morrissey, insurance agent who discussed antibiotic contamination coverage, were among speakers at the 19th annual meeting of the Centreport Co-op.

when Lehigh discontinued its hauling trucks.

Today, the co-op employs seven full time drivers and seven substitutes. They drive seven tankers throughout Berks, Lebanon, and Schuylkill counties. From 100 members, over 76.5 million pounds of milk is hauled annually, making up approximately one-tenth of the total volume of milk at Lehigh Valley Dairy.

The current rates are still some of the lowest to be found. In addition to the low rates, Centreport does not charge a milkhouse stop fee, usually \$2.00, and has no fuel adjustment clause. (as fuel prices rise so does the hauling fee) According to John Jacoby, secretary-treasurer of the co-op for 19 years, this keeps the bookkeeping simple which keeps expenses down.

"Most fellows don't know what those milk house stops mean anyway," he said.

The 19th annual meeting held on March 23 at the Tulpehocken Church, Richland, also brought another advantage to members. In a unanimous vote, the bylaws were changed to reduce the membership fee from \$25.00 to \$5.00. Any current member who had paid the \$25.00 will get the \$20.00 refunded to him. This will be reimbursed at the same time that the dividend funds are sent.

Jacoby explained that the co-op is in fine shape and the higher membership fee is no longer needed. He also stated that one of the competitors is using this fee against the cooperative to get more members.

Centreport Milk Hauling

Cooperative's current board of directors include: Donald Landis, R1 Myerstown, president; Nicholas Kopicz, R1 Mohrsville, vice president; John Jacoby, R1 Mohrsville, secretary-treasurer; Willard Stauffer, R1 Womelsdorf; Phares Musser, R1 Newmans-town; John Krall, Lebanon; and Richard Hoffman, R1 Bernville. Nicholas Kopicz and John Jacoby have served on the board since the charter and are the only two of the original five members left with the cooperative.

Rufus Bashore's son has taken over his operation in the Mohrsville area and Paul Phillips' sons have started their own dairies in the Centreport area.

Roy Hetrick, director, Lehigh Valley Cooperative Farmers, spoke at the meeting and fielded questions from the audience. "Lehigh does need more milk," he stated. He pointed out the new antibiotic policy of the dairy. Instead of the penalty system previously imposed, farmers are not responsible for insurance to cover the cost of any damaged milk.

"We're the people who put those antibiotics in those cows, let's see that it stays out of that milk," he said.

He was questioned by President Landis on whether it was necessary for Centreport to haul so much milk to the Lansdale plant. "It's costing us 1000 gallons a month more fuel," Landis stated. Hetrick explained that all haulers are treated equally by loads and because of the Baltimore plant,

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Four of the five original dairymen who started the Centreport Co-op in 1965 include, from the left, John Jacoby, R1 Mohrsville; Rufus Bashore, R1 Mohrsville; Nicholas Kopicz, R1 Mohrsville; and Paul Phillips, Centreport.



John Jacoby, son of the secretary-treasurer of the co-op, is the driver of the newest addition to the tanker fleet and one of seven full-time drivers.