

Little country store offers big bargains

BY SUZANNE KEENE

MOUNT JOY — An unobtrusive sign at the end of a long, stoney farm lane bordered with rows of corn marks the entrance of the "The Country Store" near Mount Joy. An inattentive motorist could easily drive by and miss the little shop that lies at the end of the lane, but many stop to pick up some flour, sugar, meat, cheese or other groceries.

When James and Lillian Zimmerman opened the doors of their store seven years ago, some days few customers came, while other days no one came. Now, they say, an average of 50 customers a day find their way down that long farm lane.

Many of the customers, Lillian said, come to purchase baking supplies, which she sells at bargain prices in both small and large quantities.

The most popular items, she

says, are raisins, brown sugar and spices. For kids, the candy shelf is one of the biggest attractions.

Lillian says she is able to offer her products at reduced prices by purchasing flours, sugars, spices, dried fruits, nutritional snack mixes, meats and cheeses in bulk and then repackaging them.

She purchases spices in five pound boxes, then repackages them into ¼-pound containers, passing on an almost 50 percent savings to her customers. While not all the savings are that great, most things cost less at the Country Store than they do in the supermarket, Lillian said.

"Anything you order in quantity, you get it for less," Lillian remarked, estimating that she saves about 20 cents per pound when purchasing items in bulk quantity.

"Those little things make a difference," she continued.



Lillian Zimmerman checks out Fran Stauffer, one of her neighbors, in the small store she runs out of a farmhouse.

Many of her products are available in a variety of package sizes, ranging from ½ pound to 25 pounds. "There are also people who want 100 pounds of flour," she said, noting that the larger the order, the greater the savings to the customer.

Lillian handles most of the responsibility for the store, and James is in charge of the farm's 90 head of steers.

However, James does help out with the store, doing much of the banking, helping with the packaging and assisting customers when things get really busy. "He helps me out when I'm in need," Lillian says with an appreciative glance toward her husband.

The Zimmermans have four children - Jamson, 10; Angela, 8; Donovan, 5; and Crystal, 2. Jamson and Angela help out with the packaging and write labels. "It gives them practice in their penmanship," Lillian said.

Angela especially enjoys waiting on customers and they all like to sample the candy.

Opening a country store in their rented farmhouse was originally Lillian's idea. One of her mother's neighbors had a similar store in Ephrata, and when the neighbor went out of business, she shared her business knowledge with Lillian.

"She kind of passed things on to me and gave me the things I needed," Lillian said.

Before she opened her own store, Lillian said she used to visit her

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Homestead Notes



James unloads boxes of groceries from bulk distributors into the room behind the store where the Zimmermans do the repackaging and labeling.



Lillian does most of the work in the store herself, including stocking the shelves.



Packing food in smaller quantities is a family affair. Here, James and Lillian get some help from Angela and Donovan.



The store also offers fresh lunchmeats and cheeses. Here, Lillian slices some bologna for a customer.