

Four Generations Of Hoffers Say Marketing Gets 'In Your Blood'

MARY LAEGER-HAGEMEISTER
Extension Home Economist
HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)

— Market going has been in the Hoffner family for four generations. It's a tradition passed down from mother to daughter, again and again. In the past 40 years, four business-minded women have operated the Hoffner Poultry and Egg stall at the Broadstreet Market in Harrisburg.

Mrs. Landis Hoffner began operating the stall, assisted by her two daughters, Dolly and Fay, and son Aaron. Then it was passed on to daughter Dolly Pickel. She in turn has kept it in the family with the assistance of her daughter JoAnn and son Richard. Dolly Pickel is still behind the counters helping the customers; however, her daughter JoAnn Stine is now the official "boss" of the business since April 1990. But the tradition does not stop there. JoAnn's 12-year-old daughter, Dolly Jo, helps throughout the entire summer, on Saturdays and during school breaks.

It is such a tradition that Dolly said, "JoAnn was almost born here. When she was pregnant with Dolly Jo, I told her she couldn't have the baby on market days and she didn't!"

However, both recall that they brought their babies into the market when the babies were just a couple days old.

When asked why they have kept the business in the family for four generations, the women's mile and confess, "Market gets in your blood!"

Broad Street Market's History

The Harrisburg Broad Street Market, the oldest market of its type in Pennsylvania, has been in operation since 1860. People can buy almost anything they need at the unique market, which is open Thursday, Friday and Saturday for 10 hours each day. That's 10 hours of standing on your feet, greeting customers, and trying to keep them happy and coming back.

ing to help one another. "People knew each other and seemed more like family," Dolly said. "Now, the exhibitors don't have as much in common and just aren't as friendly."

Accentuate the Positive

"The best part of market is the people. Some are extremely nice and some you just have to get along with," Dolly and JoAnn said. JoAnn commented that even when they aren't at market, they often encounter someone they know from market. As a child she remembers that she and her brother "had to behave because we never knew if we would run into someone we knew!"

"Customers are like a family," said Dolly. "They share stories of their children and show pictures. We've been able to see the children grow up. Sometimes, we don't know their names, but we know faces and they trust us."

The women's main concern is pleasing the customer. Local people are the biggest customers as they may get everything they need in one location. Since supermarkets are not easily accessible to them, the market serves a community need. The biggest asset is that consumers can see what they're getting and its freshness.

They do not have to buy pre-packaged food that they cannot inspect prior to purchase.

Hoffner customers can purchase chickens either whole, parts, or deboned at no extra charge. Another unique service is to offer the bones from chicken breasts to people who want to use them to make chicken broth.

Another aspect that is difficult to find in the supermarket is service with a smile. Dolly and JoAnn greet every customer with a smile and cheery hello. Some are customers who have lost count of the number of years that they've been coming to the market. Others are new customers with individual tastes that Dolly and JoAnn strive to fulfill.

Last week, one faithful custom-



Dolly Pickel, right, and her daughter JoAnn Stine, left, said going to market gets in your blood.

emitting smells of fresh baked goods and tempting even the most disciplined person.

Busy Schedules

Until the Avian flu epidemic, the women got up at 2 a.m. every Thursday morning and started butchering 250 to 300 chickens. "We had to be done by 5 a.m. so that JoAnn could help with the milking, and then we'd go to market. "We earned our money the hard way," remarked Dolly.

That has changed now. They buy the chickens from Pennfield on Wednesday and fill the coolers. "It's a lot easier," Dolly said.

The women sell an average of 1,599 1/2 lbs. of chicken and 334 dozen eggs per week. At Thanksgiving more than 300 turkeys are

sold the Saturday prior to Thanksgiving Day. That is the biggest sale day of the year.

When asked about what they do in their spare time, JoAnn remarked that Sunday is a day for church and just resting — unless of course there's something else to do which there usually is. Monday is bank day and Tuesday is a day to run errands so that they can be ready for market again by Thursday.

Both women do get some vacation. "It works out best by taking turns," said Dolly.

For fun, JoAnn said that she goes out to eat. Her favorite foods are seafood or Italian.

Dolly loves working in her yard

and gardening. JoAnn said that the whole family enjoys the produce of Dolly's labors in the garden.

Other key people to making the business successful are JoAnn and Dolly's spouses. Dolly remarked that when they first took over the business, her husband, Marlin, was involved, but he prefers taking care of the dairy farm. He supports her efforts in the business but stays on the farm where he feels most comfortable.

Harrisburg Broad Street Market is an educational experience. When you go, be sure to stop by and see Dolly and JoAnn at Hoffner's Poultry and Egg stall. Then you will understand why customers continue their patronage.



JoAnn waits on a customer.

The city-owned facility was renovated about 12 years ago. Redevelopment brought big changes. Prior to the renovation, the majority of the small holders were farmers, now only five are actually farmers. One of the most recent changes was establishing a fast-food court in the middle of one of the buildings.

"That never used to be here; it has taken away stalls for people to use as sales," Dolly said.

With the change in stall holders came a different type of stand holder. Prior to this time, the majority of stall owners were farmers will-

er came to get his weekly purchase and shared his sorrow in losing his 45-year-old daughter to death that very morning. Neither Dolly nor JoAnn knew the man's name, but there were tears in their eyes as they listened and grieved for him. That personal touch contributes a great deal to the success of their business. It also helps an observer understand what they mean when they say market gets in their blood.

One of the other advantages of market-going is "all the good food!" remarked JoAnn. Directly across from their stall is a bakery

Homestead Notes