



Linda Helsey whips up some strawberry topping in her turn-of-the-century kitchen. Unlike most women, Linda has two kitchens, a modern one and a reconstructed one from the turn of the century.

## Strawberry Lady Caps Season With 400 Pies

**LOU ANN GOOD**

**Lancaster Farming Staff  
MOUNT JOY (Lancaster Co.)**

— "There goes the Strawberry Lady," whisper children and adults when Linda Heisey of Mount Joy enters a room."

While Linda wears many "hats," her favorite is the Strawberry Lady.

Dressed with strawberry-shaped earrings and clothed with a strawberry-designed apron, Linda said that she earned her nickname because she is in charge of making strawberry pies for the annual Kraybill Mennonite School Benefit Auction for the past 14 years.

"It's so much fun and so satisfying to see people's faces when they see the volume of strawberry pies displayed," Linda said.

Today is the date for the annual benefit auction where 400 pies will be sold. Throughout the day, customers will buy the pies whole or by the piece. Most prefer the pie topped with whipped cream, but others like it plain.

"I get most of the credit for the pies, but I shouldn't," Linda said. "There are so many people helping, I could never do it alone."

The day before the sale, about 600 quarts of berries are flown in from California because they taste and hold up better than those raised in Florida, according to Linda.

Although the pies need to be made the day of the sale, much of the preparation can be done ahead of time. Linda lines up the help.

"We used to have mothers and grandmothers bake the shells, but the flavor varied so much that we thought it was best to have a more uniform taste," Linda said. Now she orders the pie shells from Minnich's Bakery in Litz.

The day before the sale, it takes Linda about 10 hours to prepare the whipped topping in her kitchen.

The morning of the sale, the strawberries are washed and stemmed by about 20 people.

Other helpers mix the strawberry glaze. For many years the pies were transported from the kitchen to the food area by a garden tractor. But, the pies look better if they are handled gently so the pie shells are filled and "assembly-lined" to the

school lobby where another group of 20 ladies top the pies with whipped topping.

"It takes about 3½ hours to get the pies assembled," Linda said. "In all the years, we only lost one pie that smashed when someone accidentally dropped it."

Linda's interest in strawberries are not limited to the school benefit auction. She accessorizes her home and wardrobe with strawberry collectibles.

Unlike most women, Linda has two kitchens, a modern one and a reconstructed one from the turn of the century.

"Family pieces just sort of dribbled in so we fixed up the basement so we could keep the pieces together," Linda said. Now she often cooks on the Elmira wood stove for family gatherings and winter evenings.

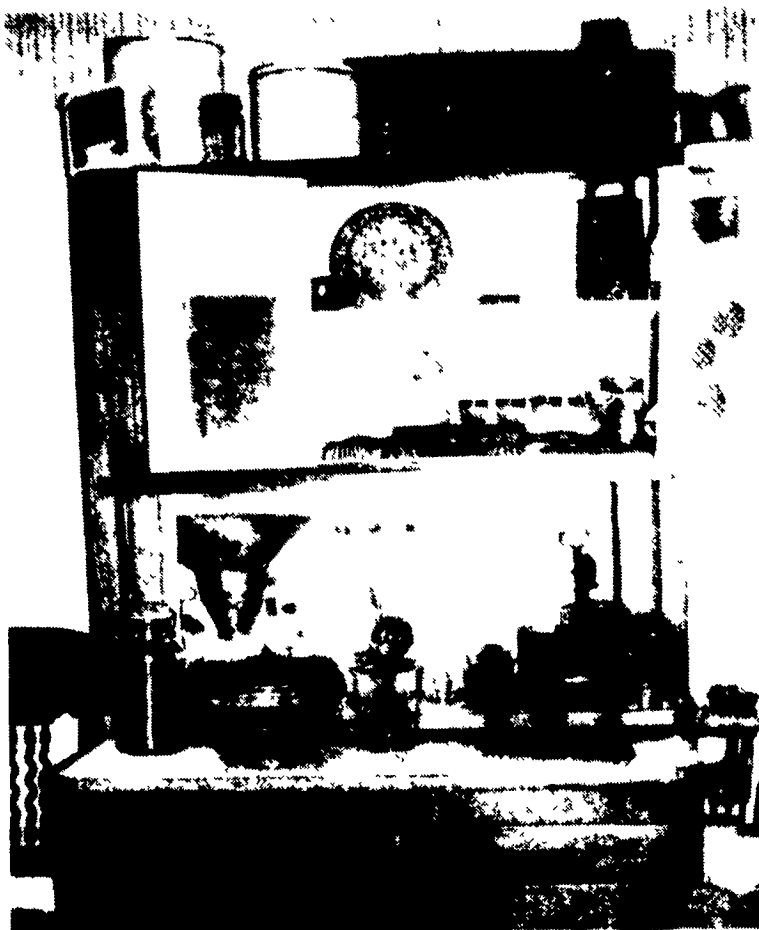
A Hoosier cabinet houses a flour bin, spice racks, meat grinder, pull-out shelves, bread drawers, and other specially features. The Hoosier was passed down on Linda's side, but many of the antiques originate from her husband, John's side.

The restored kitchen has an Alaska ice box, an Elmira wood stove, a jelly cupboard, and many antiques such as tin plates and a ceramic water jug from a nearby one-room school house.

Although many of her grandparents' things have been passed down, Linda has discovered baskets and other collectibles discarded in odd corners of the barn.

Twenty-two years ago, the Heiseys built a home on the family farm that is still cash cropper by tenant farmers.

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