

Zieglers Go Whole Hog In Catering

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LITITZ (LANCASTER Co.)—

From the outside, one would never guess that inside the two-story frame house at 112 Fairland Road in Lititz, dinner for 500 people is being prepared.

It's home for Dean and Carole Ziegler and their three children. It's also the location for Country Home Catering, where food for 50 to 500 is prepared before transporting to all corners of Lancaster and York counties and even some spots beyond.

The Zieglers' catering business evolved about eight years ago. That was when the Zieglers learned to roast a pig in a 55-gallon drum. Another caterer was too busy to meet the demand for pig roasts and asked the Zieglers to roast several for picnics.

They did. They learned the idiosyncrasies of roasting a 170- to 300-pound porker for about 20 hours, transporting it by truck, and carving it at the picnic site. They learned that the grease from a pig is highly flammable and can easily burst into flames when being transferred to the table. After one disastrous attempt to douse the flames with water, the Zieglers learned to be prepared to beat out the flames.

"We tried roasting pigs with and without the skin and learned that roasting it with the skin on keeps it more moist and better tasting," Carole said.

After the Zieglers perfected their pig roasting technique, they began offering other picnic-type foods. Word-of-mouth soon established the Zieglers' reputation as "offering good home cooking." It wasn't long before the Zieglers decided to go "whole hog" in the catering business.

Now the family-run business offers buffet and sit-down catering in addition to the outdoor dinners.

The Zieglers turned their two-story garage into a commercial kitchen and added an addition to house the restaurant-style appliances.

It was a hefty decision for the Zieglers, who first needed to pay \$1,000 for a water test to "check every possible mineral" in order to pass government inspection, Carole said.

The original quote of \$25,000 for the refrigerator, stove, sinks, and equipment was greatly reduced by the Zieglers who attended restaurant auctions to pick up used equipment.

The business name, Country Home Catering, was selected because it exemplified that the food is homemade.

"My wife has always been a great cook," Dean said.

She also received some tidbits of advice on cooking for a crowd from her grandmother, who was head cook for Brethren Village, a retirement community. Carole's mother and three sisters have often helped out with waitressing and some food preparation. An Amish neighbor makes yeast rolls and pies for the meals.

In addition to pig roastings, the Zieglers also serve roast beef that has been marinated in spices and roasted in a barrel. Some other entrees include barbecued chicken, delmonica steak, ham loaf, meat loaf, turkey with filling, boneless stuffed breast of chicken, breaded baked chicken, baked ham with pineapple glaze, baked stuffed flounder, chicken cordon bleu, baked stuffed pork chops, and pork and sauerkraut.

Carole estimates that the most popular choices are roast pork or marinated chicken breast with baked corn.

While some people are inclined to believe that catering for small groups is easier, Carole disagrees.

She doesn't think it takes that much more time to prepare the food. She said, "I prefer large groups, which are mainly drop-in so serving the group is spread out over a period of hours instead of serving 100 people an hour."

A stove is installed in a cube van used for catering purposes. Having the stove on the truck usually works really well except on rainy days, when running back and forth between the truck and pavilion can be a drenching experience.

Summer months are the busiest for catering. Often, the Zeiglers have two and three catering dinners on a Saturday. Dean works full time for White Oak Mills hauling pigs. It is not unusual for his schedule to prevent him from returning home in time to assist Carole. Nonplussed, Carole is known to roast a pig herself in addition to doing additional food preparations.

"You learn to make do," said Carole, who presents a calm steadiness to the many demands of running the business. "In this business, you've got to be prepared for anything to happen."

Although Carole and Dean almost always do total food preparation themselves, they hire wait-



Country Home Catering owner Carole Ziegler and her daughter Heather serve a small buffet-style luncheon. Carole and her husband Dean prepare food for up to 500 persons.

resses to help serve the food. Their own children, Brandon, 11; Corby, 9; and Heather, 5, even get their fingers in preparation.

Heather said that she likes to help her mother peel cooked potatoes and eggs. Her brothers help with wrapping and serving barbecued chicken.

When the family returns from a catering appointment, it is not unusual for neighboring children to come over to help eat up the leftovers and help with cleaning up.

Brandon and Corby have an ulterior incentive for helping with the catering business. Their dad promises that they may buy more sheep for their 4-H projects. Last season, Brandon took the championship market lamb placing at the Manheim Community Farm Show.

The sons' love for sheep was instilled in them by their father, who learned to shear sheep when he was an FFA student at Manheim



Dean Ziegler slices meat in the commercial kitchen installed to prepare for the catering business.

Central High School. For three summers after graduation, Dean quit his full-time job for three months to travel around the state to shear sheep.

The boys raise the sheep on a neighboring farm, where they built a ramp and hurdles to exercise the sheep.

It is not unusual for Carole to help out with the sheep. In the first week of training, the sheep are often stubborn and Carole loads

them on a wagon when they refuse to cooperate.

"I'm not animal person," Carole said.

But put her in the kitchen, and life takes on a whole new perspective — one that the whole family shares. They sometimes daydream of building a banquet hall or opening a restaurant so that more people can enjoy the good taste of Country Home Catering.

For more information, call the Zieglers at (717) 664-4254.



Dean, Carole, and Heather Ziegler stand in front of the truck used to transport food for their business, Country Home Catering.

Homestead Notes