



Les and Darlene Stauffer operate The Country Confectioner, which makes custom candy for any occasion.

Sweet Surprises Found At The Country Confectioner

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Lancaster Farming Staff
MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) —
What does an outhouse, a pacifier,
and a deviled egg have in
common?

If you see those items at The
Country Confectioner in Manheim
— they're chocolate.

These realistic items with hun-
dreds of other surprises are made at
a unique little candy shop situated
along a winding mountain road.

According to proprietors Dar-
lene and Les Stauffer, they make
custom candy for any and every
occasion.

While they offer a full line of
traditional chocolate candy, it's
unusual pieces that catch most cus-
tomers' eyes.

Indeed, many of the items
appear to be real toys rather than
edible goodies.

A boxed tool set that looks just
like the toy tool sets and a toy cos-
metic kit with its hair brush and
comb are completely edible.

Many of the pieces appear too
delightful to eat. But those who
taste the candy become faithful
customers of The Country
Confectioner.

The Stauffers have developed
several unique combination can-
dies such as "avalanche" in white
or brown chocolate and "mint
bark."

The Stauffers began their candy
making business three years ago
when Les was laid off from his job
he held for 18 years as a painter
and paperhanger.

Darlene had previously taken a
one-hour candy-making class and
liked dabbling in candy making for
fun.

One day, Les watched her mak-
ing some candy and decided to
help out.

His reaction was "This is fun.
Maybe we can sell this."

The couple started by taking
orders from friends and
acquaintances.

For the first few months they
cooked, stirred, and formed batch-
es of chocolate in the kitchen.

"After that first Easter, I knew
we must get out of the house," Les
said.

The couple remodeled an
attached summer kitchen and shed.
The light airy rooms now offer
plenty of space for making and dis-
playing the candy.

The couple has about 2,000
molds but enjoy mixing and com-

bining the molds to come up with
unique designs.

Some pieces such as the out-
house that is made in 13 different
parts, must be pieced together.

Les said that his previous job
experience comes in handy when
he paints chocolate.

"I don't really like to use the
word 'paint,' because people
think, what in the world do you do
to the chocolate?" Les said.

Basically what Les does is color
white chocolate to imitate the col-
ors found in the original item.

The couple has no set schedule
other than for store hours.

"We do whatever needs to be
done at the time," Darlene said.

Before Easter the Stauffers
geared up intensely to build up
stock by making candy 12 to 15
hours a day.

"I think it is easier hanging pap-
er than doing all that needs to be
done to keep the business going,"
Les said. "It's a big challenge —
especially the paper work."

It's also a challenge to figure out
how much to make of each variety.
Some items that the Stauffers
expect to be good sellers are not,
and some that they don't expect
take off.

Sometimes it's a matter of eye
appeal. Occasionally a slow-
moving item will take off when the
color is changed.

In addition to the usual assort-
ment of chocolates, rabbits, cros-
ses, and eggs, items available are
lollipops shaped in every imagin-
able form from flowers and clowns
to fudgesicles and cows. Novelty
chocolates are found molded into
shapes such as tooth brushes, car-
rots, trucks, tractors, paint brushes,
chickens, tic-tac-toe games. . . .

An assortment of realistic fruit
that the couple arranges into fruit
baskets is available in candy form.

The couple have two children, 7
and 8 years old. The children's
candy eating is closely supervised.

Les said, "Sometimes I sneak
them a piece of sugar-free candy
and they are perfectly content."

Primarily, Darlene takes care of
the selling. That's her duty, she
explained, "because customers
seem to feel more comfortable
buying candy from a woman, and
besides I'm a people person."

Her husband does most of the
packaging and labeling and "he's
great with laying out displays,"
Darlene said.

During candy holidays such as

Valentine's Day, Christmas, and
Easter, the Stauffers also sell from
a cart at Park City in Lancaster.

Darlene does most of the candy
making but her husband needs to
take care of it when she works at
the Park City location.

Sometimes, candy-making
becomes a bit sticky. Les, who is
always looking for shortcuts, con-
fessed that one time he tried to
make a double batch of their "fam-
ous peanut butter brickle," but he
did not calculate the proper mea-
surements. The peanut butter
brickle never hardened and he had
to discard 16 pounds of it.

The Country Confectioner is
open year-around at their home
store located at 1972 Mountain
Rd., Manheim. September through
May store hours are Monday
through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 5
p.m., Friday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.,
and by appointment. Telephone
number is (717) 664-4796.

A cart filled with products from
The Country Confectioner is
located in the Sears Mall at Park
City. The cart is manned during
Park City's hours but the Stauffers
only have the cart opened for one
month during the Easter, Christ-
mas, and Valentine seasons.



A hobby turned into busi-
ness for Darlene who enjoys
making chocolate in unique
shapes such as cows, trac-
tors, outhouses, pacifiers,
and tennis racquets.

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