



With exceptionally warm winter temperatures, Stan Brown has kept tabs on the orchard's fruit tree buds even more closely than most years.



While the trees sleep, the Brown family finishes pruning and makes final plans for spring plantings. At right are Stan and Nona Brown, with son Scott, his wife Brenda and their children, Mandy and Travis. Customers often park at their market nearby just to watch the beautiful sunsets over these hillsides neatly planted to rows of fruit trees.

Brown's Market Celebrates Half-Century

JOYCE BUPP

York Co. Correspondent

LOGANVILLE (York Co.) — There was plenty to celebrate at the party thrown recently by the Brown's Orchard Retail Market. A project of a committee of the market's employees, the annual celebration served as a salute to the local orchard's 50th year in business.

"We are so blessed with the team of people we have; we think so much of our employees," says Stan Brown, who with his son, Scott, operates the four-generation family orchard and retail market. "Some of them have been with us for 20 and 30 years."

Apparently the feeling is mutual. Among other tributes from the staff, Brown and his wife Nona were presented a hand-crafted commemorative flag to display at the market.

Brown's Orchards business has deep roots in Loganville history, back even beyond the golden anniversary being celebrated through 1998. After losing his job through the closing of a York manufacturing firm, Brown's father, Earl, altered his career direction to the fruit and poultry farm operated by an aunt. Stan Brown, then 14, quickly developed an interest in the orchard business. His father encouraged him to get a college degree and pursue another career.

But a love for the land had planted itself in Stan Brown's heart. After initial pre-med studies, he returned home in 1953 to work the orchards. The following year, he and Nona, whom he had met at York College, were married. Though the military summoned him in 1956 into the Army engineers, Stan and Nona returned right back home after his two-year service to their beloved rolling hills of peach and apple trees.

During the next 20 years, the Brown's added small parcels of land, gradually expanding the orchard to 74 acres. A 99-acre addition in 1972 more than doubled their production capability. Meanwhile, sales continued from the original small stand along the Old Susquehanna Trail, serving the burgeoning development pouring across rural southern York County.

One Christmas more than two decades ago, Brown tiptoes into the holiday fruit basket business, working from their

home. Stand personally "built" the fruit structure in the baskets in one part of the basement, then moved them to another section where a few part-time employees added candies, bows and other decorative extras. The gift basket popularity exploded; within a few years, the Christmas season found every inch of the Brown's basement crammed with baskets in preparation. Some nights, Brown got little sleep trying to keep up with orders.

Meanwhile, their daughter Linda had developed a side business on her own, an outgrowth of 4-H projects. She spent her teenage summers baking fresh fruit breads and cherry puddings to sell at the market, building a college fund. Like the gift basket business, the fresh-baked goods quickly won a following of customers.

With a need for a larger marketing area, the bakery potential and growing demand for fruit baskets, the Browns knew a major retail expansion was needed. In May 1986, years of planning fell into place with the opening of a spacious new market facility, sited on a picturesque knoll among the apple orchard. Even before the spring opening, the holiday fruit basket business had been relocated to the unfinished market, finally freeing up the Brown's basement for family use.

"It all flowed together," says Brown of the wildly-successful retail center with its bakery located in one corner, fruit basket area in another, and overflowing with attractive displays of fresh produce and country gifts. Offering top quality has always been the primary goal.

"God helped us find solutions; He has had a hand in this," Nona adds, with a smile.

"We were concerned with how people would react to a market environ," Brown relates. "We wanted a warm atmosphere, with a feeling of friendliness. We decided to use a lot of wood. It has a sort of personality all its own."

From the beginning, the bakery business has played a key role in the market's customer attractions. As the baking demand outgrew Linda's summer sideline, their friend Bill Ream took over her place in the family kitchen, creating his specialty apple dumplings. Ream

stayed on for several years after the opening of the market, where apple dumplings remain a favorite of the steady stream of customers.

Though they thought they had heeded advice about not building too small, in less than two years, space was at a premium. The bakery staff was dedicated to the "made from scratch" concept and needed more room. An enlarged bakery crowded the former office and warehouse area, creating a domino-effect of too-little working area for everyone. The solution was the first of several steps of expansion, adding a much larger office, more warehouse space and cold storage. Scott's wife, Brenda, joined the operation about the same time.

"Brenda brought a lot of knowledge of computers to our business," Brown praises his daughter-in-law. "And I can't credit Scott enough for his abilities." The couple is a valuable management team, with Brenda handling the accounting responsibilities and Scott managing the orchards and production side. Their daughter, Mandy, works in the market and son, Travis, has a keen interest in both the orchard and market sides enterprises.

Tree fruits — peaches and apples — remain the mainstays of the Brown's orchard production. Lesser space is devoted to sweet and sour cherries, pears, nectarines, several varieties of plums, even a few apricots when the blooms are spared from spring freezes. Strawberries, including u-pick, are one of the first highlight of the summer season. Blueberries are a more recent, and expanding, addition.

"We used to grow a whole selection of vegetables, but got to the point of not knowing what to do first. So we decided to focus on sweet corn and pumpkins. We have good local people who grow the other things, which helps them and helps us. It's worked out wonderfully," explains Stan.

Brown's pumpkin crop has become a special project handled by Scott's family. They cultivate four acres devoted to the fall favorite, everything from the tiny, decorative types to those with giant jack-o-lantern potential. Last summer, however, with one of the worst droughts in decades sizzling southern

York County, the pumpkin crop withered away from prolonged lack of rain.

In addition to keeping customers happy with their 15 or so acres planted in fresh sweet corn, the corn plantings are useful on land being renovated for orchards. Newer varieties of fruit trees tend to be smaller and producing in about half-the time it took the old standard ones; however, they are likely to have a shorter productive life expectancy than older varieties. Therefore, peaches need to be renovated about every 15 years, while apples are generally good for about 20, according to Brown.

"We like to moldboard plow organic matter into the sod for conditioning, before replanting to trees," he says. "At one time, we disked between the trees in all the orchards to keep the weeds down. But that caused soil erosion. Now, we use a sod cover so we don't have to disturb the soil."

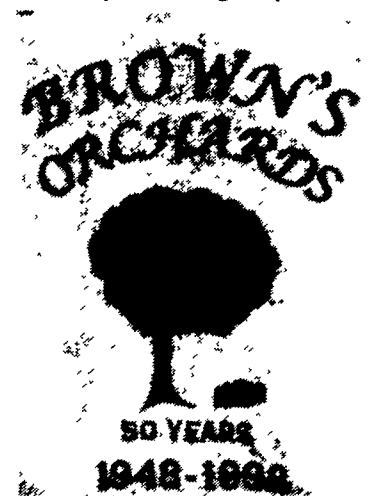
In addition, a tight cover of sod, helps to prolong the life of peach plantings. A microscopic pest, the soil nematode called "tomato ringspot" thrives in the roots of broad-leaved weeds, including dandelions. Thick sod helps limit the growth of such weeds, thus helping to delay "peach tree decline."

Along with newer varieties,

Scott is cultivating some types of apple trees trained on wire. More shallow rooted, these cultivars are more susceptible to wind damage, and the wire offers added support. And, solid "hedgerows" of trees are, in some ways, more efficient to care for, including the need for lesser amounts of disease control materials.

"We are now getting more production, using less material, than before. The use of spray on a crop is like giving trees medicine when they are sick. You

(Turn to Page B7)



To commemorate Brown's Orchard Market's 50-year anniversary, their employees presented Stan and Nona Brown with a handcrafted flag to fly over the entrance.



When not at the Market or industry activities, Stan and Nona Brown can often be found catching up on paperwork in their cozy sunroom overlooking the rolling hills of fruit trees.