

Ritchey's Dairy Is For Ice Cream Lovers

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MARTINSBURG (Blair Co.)
 — Opening in August of 1941, Ritchey's Dairy has long been known as an ice cream lovers delight.

Now owned and operated by third generation, Oliver C. Ritchey, the dairy is still small and still successful. Oliver's grandfather died in 1963. Oliver's father retired in 1972.

While many dairies have come and gone, Ritchey's is the only dairy in Blair and Bedford counties today which processes milk.

"The dairy business has done a 180-degree turn around," said Ritchey. "When it started, they used to skim the cream from the top and dump the skim milk to the hogs or throw it away.

"Folks still like their rich ice cream and butter, but we have trouble knowing what to do with all the cream. And, we sell mostly 2 percent or no fat milk and chocolate milk."

A diversified dairy operation, Ritchey's was started when Oliver's grandfather was sharing a farm with his brother. One brother wanted to farm and the other wanted to start a dairy, amicably they divided the land.

While they once purchased milk from more than 24 dairies, today they are down to six.

"But we are using the milk of a larger number of cows which produce more milk," Oliver said as he noted another big change in dairy-

ing. During the winter months, nine local schools provide a good business for both regular and chocolate milk.

Ritchey's milk is also sold, by public demand, at the local Giant Eagle, Sheetz, and Riverside stores.

Another good selling product has been a chocolate and vanilla mix for making homemade ice cream. "It goes good during the summer months when churches are having ice cream socials," Ritchey explained.

During the winter, Ritchey's creates a custard mix used by schools and businesses.

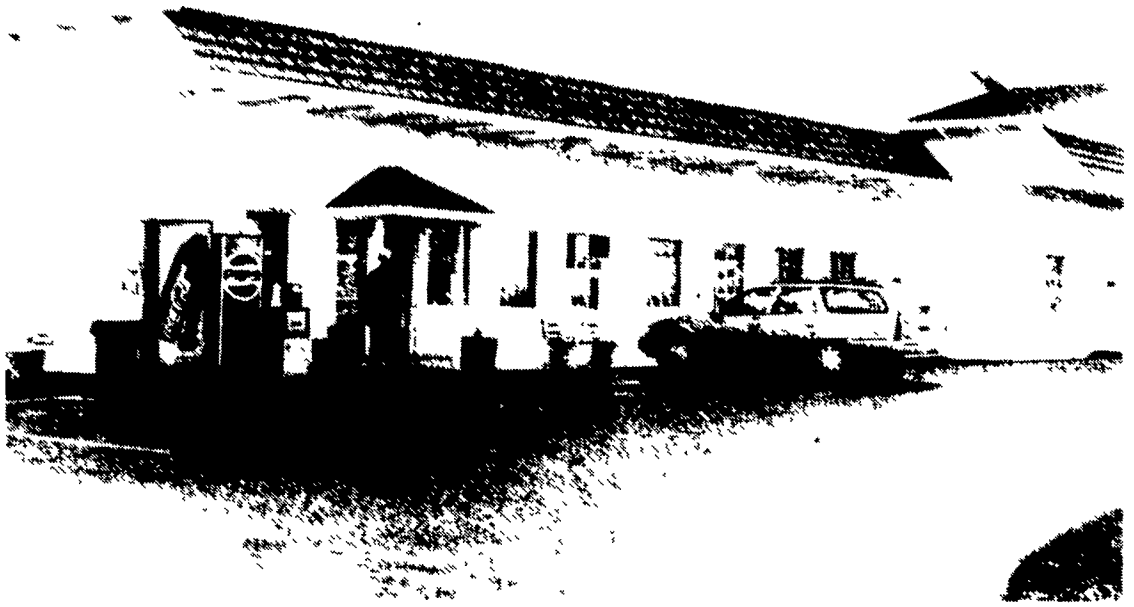
They are one of the very few dairies left which still does home deliveries.

"We started out with every day deliveries," Oliver said. "Then, during the war it was every other day to save gas, now, it's once a week. But, refrigeration is better and milk is more processed now than it was in the 1940s."

Most deliveries today are to businesses or senior apartment complexes, but there are still a few homes which request the service.

The first dairy in the area to go bulk, Ritchey's usually has plenty of milk for all of its separate areas. "But, if we run short we have a contract with Land O' Lakes to bounce their supply," Ritchey continued.

In the 1960s, Ritchey's offered "Golden Guernsey Milk" and had a contract with the Sollenberger farm to purchase all of their



Ritchey's Dairy is a landmark in Martinsburg, where area families have been going for years to buy ice cream and fresh dairy products. It now processes bulk milk, ice cream and different products.



Onsite sales, distribution through local retail chain groceries, and sales to schools are part of the marketing strategy for Ritchey's Dairy. Cory Hall packs chocolate milk into crates for delivery to schools.



The third generation of Ritcheys to run the family dairy business, Oliver C. Ritchey mans the office desk. It is the last milk-processing dairy in Blair and Bedford counties.

Guernsey product. "Today there aren't many Guernsey farms around and our milk is almost totally Holstein."

Despite their diversification, Ritchey's is best known locally for their smooth, rich, and creamy ice cream.

Using basically the same recipe with which Grandad started, the dairy has 30 flavors although not

all are in production at one time. Oliver thinks their two best sellers are chocolate butter fudge and vanilla.

The parking lot and small store area are jammed on a hot summer night with ice cream lovers savoring the various flavors.

Ed's Steak House, the Spring House Restaurant, Ivystone, Mrs. G's, and Happy Hollow are

among the restaurants in the area which offer Ritchey's ice cream for dessert.

"Not keeping all our eggs in one basket has helped us to remain intact," Oliver noted.

The biggest problem facing the dairy today is finding good employees who are willing to work some of the crazy hours the

(Turn to Page E15)



Ritchey's dairy products, such as the chocolate milk being packaged here, have proven popular enough that local chain store franchises stock them.



Carol Ebersole and Emily Closson work at the ice cream counter at Ritchey's Dairy, a third generation family dairy business.