

'Fat Tuesday' Marks Fastnacht Indulgence

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Food And Family
Features Editor

MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) — The sweet aroma of frying fastnachts wafted throughout many homes, bakeries, and restaurants on Tuesday.

Often dubbed "Fat Tuesday" or "Fastnacht Day" in southeastern Pennsylvania, the day refers to the tradition of using up all the household fat and sugar in preparation for the Lent season.

Traditionally many Christians



The dough feels "right" for rolling.

observe Lent as a time of fasting and self denial. So 'Fat Tuesday' started as sort of their last fling of food indulgence before observing strict dietary constraints.

Although the religious connotations to the observance have mostly been discarded, the habit of enjoying the fried, doughy fastnachts continues to expand among both the religious and the not so religious.

Favorite family recipes vary from home to home. Some people have firm ideas of what a fastnacht should look and taste like, but the taste of those baked at Hitzes Farm Market this week are difficult to surpass.

Although both Bob and Ruth Hitz, owners of the Farm Market, grew up in families who made the annual fastnachts, they use a recipe received from a coworker of Bob's more than 30 years ago.

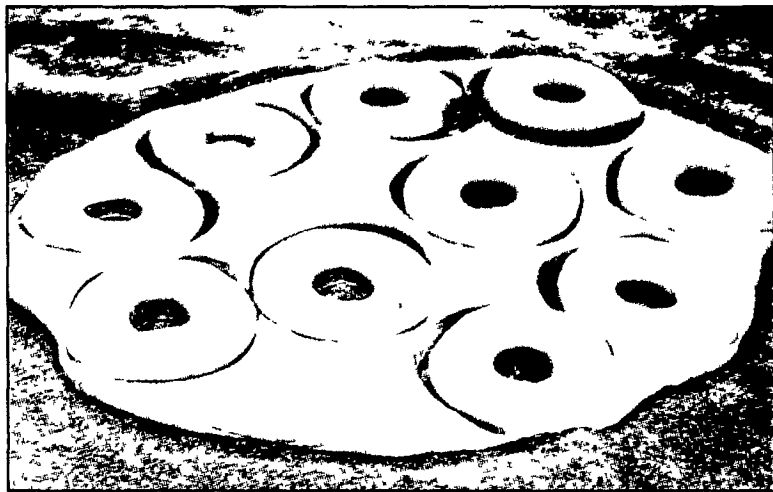
"I think it is more like those made in Berks County," Ruth said of the recipe which incorporates potatoes and the liquid in which potatoes are cooked. The raised dough is cut into doughnut shapes and fried in vegetable oil, dipped in glaze or covered with powdered or granulated sugar to suit each customer's taste.

Orders increase annually since they couple began to sell them at their market located along Route 72 between Manheim and Lebanon. This year they made 500 dozen. That is no easy feat for the couple with the help of two full-time and four part-time employees while they continue to fill a deli, plus bakery, lunch, and store orders.

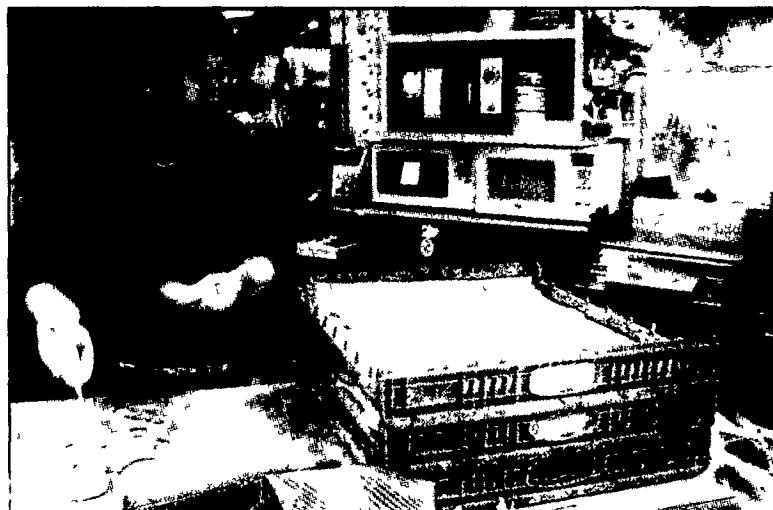
The couple worked almost around the clock for two days to fill customer demand. Ruth mixed 12 batches of dough on Sunday afternoon. The dough raised overnight, and she began cutting doughnut shapes at 4 a.m. on Monday morning until 7



Rolling out 500 dozen fastnachts is not a job for the unmotivated. Ruth wears wrist bracelets to protect her wrists from injury.



Some people believe that fastnachts should be square and without holes, others, such as the Hitzes, have always used the traditional doughnut shape.



After Ruth cuts the fastnachts she places them in trays that are stacked until the dough has doubled in size.



Hot from the fryer are these fastnachts (or fasnachts as some people spell it). From left are Gwenda Fittery with Ruth and Bob Hitz.

p.m. that evening. Tuesday began at 1:30 a.m and continued full tilt until closing time at 6 p.m.

Frying fastnachts was a family tradition long before the couple opened their own Farm Market. They often made dozens to give to neighbors, family, and friends. The raves their fastnachts garnered easily influenced them to offer them to customers during the once a year Fastnacht celebration.

When the couple build their roadside stand 11 years ago, they did not foresee preparing lunches and therefore did not install a

fryer in the kitchen area. Since then, lunches have become popular, and the place has several sit-down niches for customers to enjoy a hot lunch. The couple offers an extensive menu but none of the items are fried. Consequently, fastnacht frying requires some adaptation. Bob uses two French fryers placed on the outdoor porch. The weather was quite blustery to stand outdoors frying fastnachts for two days.

Bob suffered with leg cramps from standing outside frying for two days.

The sustained rolling and cut-

ting of the dough also results in some bodily pain. Ruth wore wrist bracelets to protect her wrists.

But the weariness the Hitzes feel is well worth the satisfaction that accompanies it, they say.

"Fastnacht Day kicks off the spring season. Business picks up at the roadside market after that. It reminds us that spring is coming," Ruth said.

See the related story on Hitz's Farm Market, 2684 Lebanon Rd., Manheim. For more information, call (717) 664-2922.

Farm Market Evolves To Satisfy Demand

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MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) — Bob and Ruth Hitz grew up in large farm families in the Annille area of Lebanon County. Bob was one of 13 children and Ruth one of 12. Such large families demanded a lot of cooking and both perfected their cooking skills at an early age, but neither expected that cooking and baking would become a lifetime career for them.

Although they grew up in the same locality, they did not meet until she was worked at the local bank and he at a chain supermarket. After the couple married, and had their first daughter, Rebecca. Ruth quit her banking job to be a stay at home mom. Another daughter Shelly was born the following year.

Because she was a bit bored, Ruth started baking bread and pies to earn a bit of extra cash. At the end of the lane where they lived, the Hitzes set up a roadside table using sawhorses for the base. Soon she was selling 200 loaves of bread weekly from early spring through the fall season. But sales dropped dramatically during the winter months.

"I'm a people person," Ruth said. She missed the camaraderie of coworkers. Like many young mothers she tried a variety of jobs to see what would best mesh with being a mom, wife, and career woman.

"Like every good mother, I worked in the school cafeteria," Ruth said. She also worked for Agway Insurance Company. She



Owners Bob and Ruth Hitz stand outside Hitz Farm Market. Their daughter Shelly designed the unique structure to incorporate the growing demands of the farm market. The Hitzes started selling pies, breads, and produce from a roadside table. A greenhouse and gardening center attached to the right of the structure covers almost the same amount of area as the store.

even helped her brother plant 1,000 trees in his orchard. When the trees started bearing fruit, he and his wife opened a fruit stand and made baked goods to help utilize the fruit.

But the demands of the orchard and the roadside stand were too much work for one couple. Ruth took over the roadside stand, which was situated in a tent. She sold produce, baked goods, plants, and holiday crafts.

The venture was so successful that Bob quit his full time job to help out with all the lifting re-

quired at the stand.

"That was a bit scary, because the stand was only open six months out of the year," Ruth said.

But the couple found that they worked well together.

"We balance each other out. He is more visionary than I am," Ruth said.

The Hitzes decided that a farm stand structure would enable them to operate year-round. They found land along Route 72 be-

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