



A taste of a 100-year tradition

Drier's Meat Market in Three Oaks is celebrating a century in the family

Posted: Wednesday, March 20, 2013 6:00 am

By JANE AMMESON - HP Correspondent

The year was 1891 and 10-year-old Ed Drier was earning 25 cents a week plucking feathers from freshly butchered chickens at the Union Meat Market in Three Oaks. Drier would soon take on other duties, delivering meats for the market and working behind the counter, his salary increasing to \$6 a week. Eleven years later, in 1913, Drier had saved enough money to purchase the butcher shop from owner Alec Watson, who opened the market in 1875. Fast forward to 2013. Now owned and operated by Drier's granddaughter Carolyn and her nephew David Wooley, Drier's Meat Market is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

Much has changed in Three Oaks since those early days. The famed Featherbone Factory, which manufactured revolutionary corsets made from turkey feathers, earning a fortune for its inventor E.K. Warren, now houses an artisan distillery and the Acorn Theatre. The Drier family no longer owns a farm and slaughterhouse just outside of town from which they get their meat and no horse-drawn wagon delivers their products on unpaved city roads.

But vestiges of the past remain. The pre-Civil War building, now a National Historic Site, still has the original four-paned windows and its original wood planked floors, now worn and squeaky.

Drier's was a vital part of Three Oaks, drawing in luminaries such as poet Carl Sandburg, who had a summer home nearby. Carolyn Drier recalls stories about how her grandfather, a mainstream Republican and a local political powerhouse, was often visited by judges and other pols who drank and discussed business in the back room.

"If you wanted the vote in this part of the county," she says, "you came to Ed."

When Ed Drier Sr. died in 1964, Herald-Palladium publisher Willard Banyon wrote his obituary. It began with the line, "A sadness prevails over Three Oaks today as

the final rites are being told of one of her beloved citizens" and ended with, "Ed was a living root in the Three Oaks community tree; elsewhere he was a symbol. How many Eds there are in a town determines the kind of place it is."

Being the local butcher wasn't an easy job.

"I can only image the hard work back then of being here all day in retail," Drier says as she deftly slices off links of sausages from the long string of casings hanging from a meat hook. "And then going out to the farm and butchering the meat for the next day."

Drier's still retains that time-gone-by feel in the way sawdust is sprinkled on the floor (making it easier to sweep up blood during the butcher shop days) and the bell attached to the screen door rings when it's opened.

"This place was my father's passion," says Drier about Ed Drier Jr., who took over from his father. "And it's mine too. Even if I was rich, I couldn't see not working here."

Before Drier could drive she would ride her bike to help out in the store. After she started driving and her father opened a Drier's in Sawyer, she would load up her car on Saturday morning with items to sell and drive there, opening the store, working until 1 p.m. when someone else came to replace her. Then it was lunch with her father and mother, June, at Schwark's Tavern across the street from the Three Oaks market for 75-cent hamburgers and a bit of business advice from Ed Drier Jr.

"My dad always said to me, 'If anybody asks, business is always good,'" she says.

But as much as her life was intertwined with the market, there was a time when Carolyn Drier didn't work in the family business.

She graduated from college with a teaching degree and got married. Later, after divorcing and needing to return to work to support herself and three daughters, she wondered what she would do.

"My father offered me a job," she says. "I was glad that someone had just quit - I didn't want to think he was giving me a job just to be giving me a job."

Ed Drier Jr. taught her how to smoke hams and make sausages including Drier's famed bologna.

"It's really 80/20 ground chuck with our own seasonings," she says of the bologna, which is sold in large rings. "Our biggest mistake was calling it bologna because it's not like any bologna you can buy anywhere else. We should have called it German summer sausage."

Drier's bologna is a staple, along with their hams, hot dogs, freshly made brats, the house-made country paté-like liver sausage and tub cheeses.

"We'll probably sell about 200 hams this Easter," David Wooley says. "They take about four days each to prepare, from brining the fresh pork butts to smoking and curing them."

Wooley started working at the store full time when he was 19.

"That was 19 years ago after my grandfather passed away in 1994," he says. "But I first started doing things around here like winding string and mowing the lawn when I was 12. I'm still doing that too."

As proof of his longtime connection to the family business, Wooley points to a photo on the wall. It's him as a baby and he's next to - you guessed it - a string of bologna.

During the busy season, Drier and Wooley are joined by Carolyn's daughter Julie Schaffer.

"I always helped my grandfather with the customers so it's like I grew up here," she says. "I'm married with children of my own, but I like to come in when they need me. I'm my mom's only daughter in the area, so I'm glad to be helping carry on the family business."

Carolyn Drier doesn't even entertain the idea of retiring even on the most difficult days.

"Sometimes after a long hard day and I'm exhausted," she says noting that they have three generations worth of customers, some of whom have been visiting the store for five or more decades. "Someone will walk in and says how much they love the store. And that just does it for me."

She pauses, wrapping freshly smoked ham hocks in white butcher paper, and then adds, "Besides - what would I do?"

The following recipes are from "Dining Designed by Drier's: Carolyn's Collection," a cookbook of family recipes compiled by Carolyn Drier. The book is available at the store and through www.driers.com.

Drier's Hot Dog Appetizers

1 pound Drier's hot dogs

1 pound Drier's bacon

1/4 cup brown sugar

2 tablespoons butter

Cut hot dogs and bacon into thirds. Wrap bacon around the hot dog slices. Secure with a toothpick.

Place in a baking pan. Sprinkle the brown sugar on top and pat with butter. Bake at 350 degrees, covered, for 15 minutes. Uncover and bake 15 to 20 minutes longer. Baste with juices when done. This recipe can be frozen. Makes 20 servings.

Parmesan Ham Pasta

16 ounces bow tie pasta

2 cups Drier's ham, cubed

4 ounces canned mushroom stems and pieces, drained

1/2 cup butter

1/2 cup all purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 cups milk

10 ounces frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

4 ounces Parmesan cheese, shredded

Cook pasta according to package directions. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, sauté ham and mushrooms in butter. Stir in flour and salt until blended. Gradually add milk. Bring to a boil. Cook and stir for two minutes or until blended.

Reduce heat. Stir in spinach and cheese. Continue stirring until cheese is melted. Drain pasta. Stir into ham mixture. Serves 6.

Apricot Ham Steaks

4 thick slices Drier's ham, about 5 ounces each

2 tablespoons butter, divided

1/2 cup apricot preserves

1 tablespoon vinegar

1/4 teaspoon ground ginger

Dash salt

In a large skillet, sauté ham slices in 1 tablespoon butter until lightly browned on each side. Meanwhile, in a large saucepan, combine the preserves, vinegar, ginger, salt and remaining butter. Cook over medium heat until heated through. Serve ham with apricot sauce.

Black Bean and Drier's Polish Sausage Soup

2 19-ounce cans, ready to serve black bean soup

14 1/2-ounce can diced tomatoes with garlic and onion, drained

1 pound Drier's smoked Polish sausage, halved lengthwise and cut into 1/2-inch thick slices

1 cup loose-pack frozen whole kernel corn

In a 3 1/2- to 4 1/2-quart slow cooker, stir together black bean soup, undrained tomatoes, sausage and corn. Cover and cook on low heat for 6 to 8 hours or on high-heat setting for 3 to 4 hours. Serves 6.

Caramelized Bacon

12 slices Drier's thick-sliced bacon

1/2 cup light brown sugar, packed

2 tablespoons water

1/2 teaspoon ground red pepper

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line cookie sheet pan with foil. Spray wire rack with Pam and place rack in pan. Cut bacon in half, arrange in single layer on rack.

Combine sugar, water and red pepper. Brush over bacon. Bake bacon for 20 to 25 minutes or until browned.