

Running the family meat market

Caroline Drier keeps the tradition alive in downtown Three Oaks

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The following are excerpts from an interview conducted with Drier's Meat Market owner Caroline Drier by Dan Collison and Elizabeth Meister of Long Haul Productions for the "Community Anthology: Voices of Three Oaks" project. Audio excerpts air on Radio Harbor Country (WRHC fm 106.7) at 11 a.m. Saturdays and at 5 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays.

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I'm Carolyn Drier. I'm member, owner, operator, chairman of the board, and janitor of Drier's Meat Market. I've always had a love for the market and I've worked there off and on since I was about fourteen years old. I took it over when my dad died in 1994.

A meeting place.

My grandfather, Ed Drier, Sr., bought the market in 1913, and for twenty-five years he was also the local justice of the peace. So the office in the back of the market was where you bought your driver's license, your license for your car, license plate, you paid a speeding ticket, you got married. He did marry a few people. So, all this was happening back in the back of this building.

It was a meeting place. Men would go from one back door to another, from the hardware store to the drug store to the back door of the meat market. They'd sit for hours and have a shot of whiskey. There was a lot going on.

And then, when my dad came back from World War II, he worked here as well. I have a picture of my dad, in 1963, with a stuffer that was hand-cranked, and it



The sausage-centric interior decor of Drier's Meat Market in Three Oaks. - photo by Long Haul Productions

might have held ten pounds. Our recipe is for 300 pounds, so you can imagine — to make the liver sausage, the summer sausage, the hotdogs, brats and Polish. I would've thought my dad would've had a tennis elbow, turning this thing as much as he did.

Taking over the market.

I graduated from Michigan State, to teach school. The meat market was not in my thoughts, because Dad had fellows in there working. Teaching was about it back then. And then I got married and pregnant and I had two girls very close together. Seven years later, I had my youngest daughter, who's now a 31-year-old. And I thought during all those years, probably ten years of raising my girls, and lucky to be a stay-at-home mom, that, after that, I would do something else.

I was about 50 when my father died and I took over, not knowing much of anything. Garry Lange, who used to be our principal in Three Oaks, had worked for the market when he was a teenager, and after my dad died Garry would come in after school and show me how to make the bologna and the liver sausage and smoke things. So, I got to where there was a time Garry couldn't come in, and I bought this new stuffer, and I thought, well, I'm just going to have to do it. And it worked. And I've been doing it ever since.

My nephew David helps. When my father died, he had just graduated from high school and was kind of wondering what he was going to do, so he came to the market, and the two of us kind of learned together. I don't know who's boss, and that's good. We want teamwork.

Being behind the counter.

Being up front is the best and sometimes the hardest. Some people do know that they're being kind of grumpy. And other people do not realize what they're saying. They'll hit the door, and they'll say, "What's good in here?" And, you know, in my mind I'm thinking of a lot of things that I could answer with. "Are you looking for a hot dog, or do you just want a little bit of an appetizer? I can do a nice thing with the summer sausage and a little liver sausage." But there are times when you're not going to please anybody. You know that. That's just a given. I try hard. And we all have bad days.

It's also enjoyable because you've got this person behind the counter who will actually talk to you and wonder, you know, "Where's your husband? You always came in with him. And now he's gone – but ..." They usually tell me that before I even ask them. Because it's an important thing, and it's a sad thing, for them. A lot of times, coming back to Drier's, where they've been coming for fifty years, is hard for them to even do.

The future.

I hope I have the death my dad has and can always be behind the counter. He died unexpectedly in '94 on the tennis courts in Florida, which was just a great death. He returned a volley and — fell.

My dad never said one thing to me about, “I hope when I’m gone you can do this. This is where I get that. This is what I do here.” He couldn’t talk about it. So, I don’t know what’s going to happen with the market. I don’t even like to think about it. It’s interesting. My dad never thought about it, either.

The market has been in my family 97 years. So, in three more years it’s going to be a hundred. I hope I can be on my feet then, because I think that will just be the best. I know one thing we won’t do — we won’t reverse the prices to 1913!