

Bill Drinkwater serves up another customer at Bill's Fine Coffee & Herb stand at the Strafford Market, c. 1984. *Courtesy of Bill & Lee Drinkwater*

The first step after the purchase was to plan the building's revised interior layout as a Farmers Market, and then to contract for the many renovations. Paul and Sam Neff worked together to determine aisle widths, and the occupancy areas for the many merchants. Several large support posts limited the choices for aisles and work areas. But, because the sales area had now tripled compared to the Wayne market, there was more than enough space to maneuver. And the several existing loading docks in the new structure would make for much easier unloading and set up for our standholders. The most challenging part of the project was the removal of many of the store's remaining fixtures, and the cutting and digging required to create drain lines within most of the market areas. The renovation work was well-handled by Horst Construction of New Holland.

A very busy afternoon immediately before Thanksgiving, 1985, at the Old Homestead Farm stand at the Strafford Market. Betsy Wiker waits on her customers, many of whom have come seeking her pumpkin pies and cookies. *Courtesy of Betsy Wiker.*

Many new standholders were needed to fill out this larger space. Vendors were chosen with an effort not to duplicate, if possible, the product lines of the existing merchants. The Wayne market had been operating Wednesday and Saturday from 6 AM to about 4:00 PM. The new market would require an additional day to provide the revenue to justify a building of this new size. For several of the family businesses, this would be a challenge. The normal pattern had been two days of preparation before each market day. Adding a Friday would clearly affect the normal harvest routine for the vegetable growers. It also impacted the staffing, having two market days back to back, especially for those with travel times of well over an hour each way. Despite some resistance to this more aggressive schedule, almost all of the vendors from the Wayne market made the move to

This image of the Rittenhouse Farms Poultry & Egg staff was taken at Christmas-time, 1999, and shows many familiar faces recalled by our readers, including: (L to R) Paul and Esther Long, Carl and Fran Leaman, Gladys Yoder, Hannah Eisenhower, Darlene Clemmer, several others in the back, and on the far right, Russ Zigler. This was certainly an experienced team. Carl calculated that the total retail experience of his staff exceeded 500 years. *Courtesy of Carl Leaman.*



Built in 1991 as an addition to the original footprint of the former Penn Fruit supermarket, the coffee area along the east front of the Strafford Market is a popular place to meet friends or take a break during busy shopping. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*



the new building, and adjusted to the increased demands. The market opened in March of 1977, with a Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday schedule ... a format continued to this day.

In preparation for opening our new Strafford market, I remember that we had planned to open at a later hour than at Wayne perhaps 8:00 ... and then stay open a bit later. But on opening day, our loyal customers were outside waiting to shop as usual at 6:00 am. Though we hadn't even set up completely, we opened the doors to let them in! It was real challenging, with our customers there early, and us not ready! We quickly realized that changing times wouldn't work, and went back to the old reliable schedule.

Paul Neff and his son Sam set the direction for the market's new activities. Sam coordinated leases and construction details for each of the standholders. Nico Huacani was chosen to serve as the new site's "market master," a term originated by the oldest farmers markets to designate the person who leads the vendor organization, and oversees customer needs and concerns as they visit the location.

In 1991, some years after commencing operation at the Strafford Market, we discerned a need to significantly improve the structure with an addition of a popular customer seating area across much of the front or east side of the building, as well as the removal of a vestibule on the front corner. By altering that front corner, space was provided for a new soft pretzel venture started by Nico and Joanna Neff Huacani. With this new launch, Nico turned over his key responsibility as market master to others.

Over the years, the market standholders adapted to new food safety codes, and to changes in display and packaging. Several new independent vendors joined us ... and a few left for various reasons. Life goes on, yet the integrity and personality of the market endured.



Country Twist's manager Matthew Huacani and his team prepare their popular "Party Dogs" for the crowds still to arrive on any given Saturday. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

The logistics of bringing product on a timely basis from Lancaster County to Stafford has occasionally been a challenge. In one instance, a six-person Weaver crew traveling to market from the Lancaster area (65 miles west) was carrying several tons of product, fundamental to the day's sales, in the truck's refrigerated cargo area. While traveling early in the morning on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, a cattle-hauling truck ahead of them was involved in a serious accident which blocked all traffic. For the next six hours, the unfortunate crew, and most of the product for the day's sales, awaited the opening of the

highway. A second crew, traveling at a later hour via a different route, arrived to find a chaotic market day with a meager line of product to satisfy high customer demand. And occasionally, when the winter forecast is especially threatening, the Weaver crew has to travel east the afternoon before and stay overnight in a local motel to assure their presence at the market the next morning. Fortunately, these crises have been few, and the market generally opens as anticipated.

Looking Ahead:

Bringing the best of Lancaster County, (breadbasket of the Main Line), from Bucks and Montgomery counties, and from our many local vendors, has certainly changed since S. Clyde and Emma Weaver started “going to Market.” For over eight decades the Lancaster County Farmers Market has successfully met the challenge of selling the freshest of homegrown and locally-produced food items – and so much more - directly to our Upper Main Line customers year-round. Filling those needs, with a true heart for customer service, positions the Lancaster County Farmers Market to continue well into the future. Our independent market vendors and their families are grateful for the ongoing support of our many faithful customers ... and we believe in their children and their grandchildren.

See you at the Market !

“My Mom went to the Farmers Market in Wayne every Saturday morning with her wicker bag in hand. I was very young and, some Saturdays, I would go with her. When we walked into the market, we were greeted by a friendly woman sitting on a chair holding a tambourine for donations. The floors weren’t tiled or wooden but it looked like packed dirt to me. The smell of freshly baked Utz Potato Chips would hit you in the face and she would buy a bag for me to munch on while we shopped. Mom would buy lunch meat for the week. She also would buy sausage, scrapple, bacon and pastries for our Sunday breakfast after church ... and souse, cheese, and ring bologna for special family occasion Saturday night “Snack Dinner.” She continued this tradition of Saturday shopping when the Farmers Market moved to the former Penn Fruit in Strafford..” — Laurie Whitman



In this 2019 image, the third, fourth, and fifth generations of S. Clyde Weaver cut a 200-pound block of “Big-eye” Swiss cheese, a best-selling product for many years, at the Strafford market. Company president Dan Neff is at left, and his son Ben Neff is in the center. Ben’s young sons are Lamar (with apron) and Clayton (on right). Ben Neff worked at the Weaver stand in Strafford from 2005–15, and is today manager of the Weaver store in East Petersburg, Pa. *Courtesy of Dan Neff.*

Glimpses of the Past

(OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT) (1) Carl and Fran Leaman have “been at market” most of their lives. In 1994 they purchased the Rittenhouse Farms poultry and egg stand at the Strafford Market from Norman Rittenhouse, and operated that stand for eight years until 2002. During their tenure as standholders, newspapers often referred to Carl, who used only Lancaster County-grown poultry, as the market’s “poultry king.” *Courtesy of Carl Leaman.* (2) Bill Drinkwater measures gourmet coffee beans at Bill’s Fine Coffee & Herb stand, c. 1985. *Courtesy of Bill & Lee Drinkwater.* (3) Bill and Lee Drinkwater serving customers at their Bill’s Fine Coffee & Herb stand, c. 1985. Their stand featured imported coffees, homegrown herbs and exotic seasonings. *Courtesy of Bill & Lee Drinkwater.* (4) From an article entitled “Fresh from the farmers’ market” in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* dated November 10, 1989, this photograph appears with the following caption: “Melvin Lefever includes fruit at his booth, Lefever’s Flowers.” *Courtesy of The Philadelphia Inquirer.* (5) Taken in 1999, this image shows John Speicher, of Ronks, standing behind the counter of J&R Baked Goods, the stand he and wife Ruth operated for over 10 years. Their business offered “fresh from Lancaster County” breads and pastries from such establishments as the Bird-in-Hand Bake Shop and Achenbach’s Bake Shop in Leola, as well as jams and canned goods from Sarah’s Kitchen in Leola. *Courtesy of Carl Leaman.*



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