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LIVESTOCK

Keystone Meats builds on region's heritage

By Mike Ryan, Ocj Field Reporter

Lima has long been a major manufacturing hub in Allen County and the area also continues to maintain a strong agricultural heritage. A true testament to the area's dual character, Keystone Meats weds these two defining aspects of Allen county by delivering farm-fresh flavor from local livestock producers to a variety of consumers at home and beyond via its butcher shop and industrial canning facility.

Keystone Meats is a family-owned and operated business with a tradition of producing all natural meat products that has been passed down through four generations of the Dorley family. The company was established in 1964 by Raymond L. Dorley and his son Raymond B. Dorley. Originally, the business raised beef on the family farm, and processed the beef to supply restaurants and grocery stores throughout Ohio and Indiana. In 1980, Dave Dorley became the third generation owner/operator. Dave built a new beef processing facility, upgraded the entire operation to USDA standards, and built a meat cannery.

Today, headed by fourth generation CEO Pete Dorley, his father, Dave, and brother-in-law Steve Conrad, Keystone Meats offers a variety of butchering and processing services to the Lima community and beyond.

"There are three integrated divisions of our company: we run a retail butcher shop, wholesale fresh meat, and operate a cannery and soup base business," said Pete Dorley.

The retail store and custom processing facility has been a staple in the Lima area for decades and local farmers and businesses have been long-time customers of Keystone Meats.

"We have been the trusted local butcher for Lima for over 50 years. We slaughter cattle for custom processing, to supply our retail store, and to sell wholesale fresh beef to local businesses like Lima's iconic Kewpee Hamburgers

and other businesses throughout central and northwest Ohio," Dorley said.

The retail store, processing plant, and canning operation are all contained under the same roof, which contributes to the freshness and quality of all of their products.

"Our retail store has a really great meat case filled with local meats that are processed right here. In that sense, Keystone is kind of a throwback to a time when the farmer, the butcher, and the consumer all knew each other," Dorley said. "Our processing plant is a modern and efficient USDA-inspected facility. It's a small butcher shop with the biggest fresh meat case around."

The Dorleys are clearly proud of their local roots and the longstanding relationships they have with livestock producers in the region.

"We really enjoy being close to the agricultural community, close to the farm. We have multi-generational relationships with many of our suppliers and customers. Beef is our specialty in the retail shop and we buy all of our cattle from producers within 30 to 40 miles of here," he said. "We source from all local family farms and always have."

Beyond the retail and wholesale meat operations is Keystone Meats' prosperous canning business, which continues to expand and flourish.

"Fast growth and broad distribution of our All Natural canned meats and soup bases are making Keystone an emerging brand in the category. We started making our canned meats decades ago to sell in our store and to sell to a few other grocery stores and butcher shops. They did pretty well, so we eventually approached some of the big retailers like Kroger and Walmart. They gave us a chance in a couple of local stores and, thanks to customers picking it up in those stores, it has continued to grow from there. Keystone All Natural canned meats can now be found throughout the entire Midwest in all conventional grocery stores," Pete said.

And Keystone produces a wide variety of quality canned meat and soup base products.

"We sell canned beef, chicken, turkey, pork, corned beef hash, and ground beef, beef in broth, and chicken in broth products," Pete said. "We also distribute beef and chicken soup bases and beef, chicken, and turkey broths. We are always working on new items, too."

The simple recipe and the prime cuts of meat used make the taste of Keystone Meats products unparalleled compared to most canned meats.

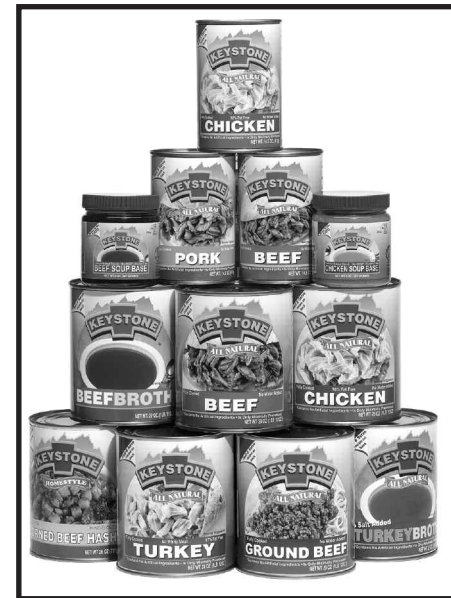
"Our methods for canning are different from most canneries. At Keystone, the premium cuts go in the can. Trimmings never go in the can. We hand select and hand cut 95% lean — or better — whole muscle meats for our canned meats. The first ingredient in our soup base is the canned meat," Dorley said.

"We make our canned meats according to a very old small-batch slow cooking method with very lean meats and nothing artificial — it's just meat and sea salt. This method does not lend itself to high volume output but it does make the most flavorful natural product possible."

The quality of the canned products and the increased consumer demand for them caused Keystone to expand their facilities and operation during the past several years, and they are again looking to grow the business.

"As our distribution of canned meats has expanded throughout the Midwest and beyond, we have had to add on to our facility several times. We have another expansion operation planned for this year. The canning work is also very labor intensive, so we are hiring more people as well," he said. "We have about 35 people working at Keystone and would like to add five to 10 more employees."

The canned products provide consumers with a fast, easy-to-fix meal with a robust, home-cooked flavor to it. This is what Pete Dorley believes has led to the increase in customer demand for his product.



Beef is the specialty at Keystone Meats and all of the cattle are purchased from producers within 30 to 40 miles of the Lima facility.

"It offers wholesome, flavorful convenience for cooking at home. It's like a crockpot meal that is all done for you. The value and quality of our canned meats really should be compared to fresh meats at the butcher shop because that is really what it is — and it is already cooked perfectly. It has been really rewarding to see the customers' response when they try it for the first time; they usually don't believe that it came from a can," Dorley said.

The company's website, keystone-meats.com, allows consumers to order bulk quantities of their canned products online, and also provides consumers with numerous recipes for preparing their savory canned goods. Illustrating the diverse and appetizing options afforded by these products, the hearty recipes range from beef stroganoff to chicken fajitas to crock pot pork carnitas.

Clearly, Keystone Meats serves the needs of a variety of consumer markets, and the company is always interested in making new contacts, whether that be with people looking for work in the processing facility, or customers looking for top-of-the-line locally raised fresh meat, or businesses looking to expand their product offerings.

Pete Dorley encourages anyone interested in what Keystone has to offer to call their customer service number at 1-800-589-5881 or to send them an email at contact@keystonemeats.com. The retail storefront, which is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., is located at 3585 Harding Highway on the outskirts of Lima.



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