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The 'famous Winsted Bologna' recipes comes to Howard Lake

By Jennifer Gallus
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What was thought to have disappeared forever, – the “famous Winsted bologna” of yesteryear has reemerged after a 36-year absence in the area.

Don Schwartz of Grandpa Ittel’s Meats in Howard Lake recently purchased the recipe and has been producing the bologna since March.

Customers from near and far would flock to Winsted’s past City Meat Market to purchase the bologna. Before the Winsted meat market closed in 1971, it proudly advertised that it was “The home of the famous Winsted bologna.”

“The original recipe came from Germany when the Rauschendorfer family settled in Jordan,” said John Lueck of Winsted, who owned Winsted’s City Meat Market from 1968 to 1971.

The Rauschendorfers first started a meat market in Jordan in the late 1800s, where they produced the bologna. A relative moved to Winsted, also in the late 1800s or early 1900s, and started producing a similar version of the Jordan bologna, according to what the late Mixie Roufs told Lueck.

The late Fred Roufs worked for the German butcher, and eventually bought Rauschendorfer’s business, as well as kept making the Winsted bologna. Fred’s son, the late Mark Roufs, together with his wife, Mixie (Campbell) Roufs eventually took over the City Meat Market in Winsted.

When Mark passed away, Mixie and her son, Tom, ran the market until Lueck bought the shop in 1968.

Although Lueck only ran the market for a few years, Lueck said, “A lot of bologna was made in those three years.”

“It was nothing to go through a half ton of bologna on special occasions like opening deer hunting and holidays. People would call or send a letter to pre-order the bologna,” Lueck said.

The late Mike Sherman would bring coolers into the market and load up with 200 pounds of the bologna and bring it to an annual convention in Las Vegas, Lueck explained. “People couldn’t get over how good it was,” he said.

It was also common practice to ship the bologna all over the US.

“Back then, you could ship it on one day and they’d have it the next. I’d

write the price of the bologna on a piece of paper, include it in the package, and write a note for them to add whatever the shipping cost was (orders weren't prepaid). I never failed to get paid for it," Lueck said.

The cost, when Lueck ran the market, was usually \$3 for two rings of bologna, and shipping was about 75 cents.

In 1971, state and federal inspections brought heavy pressure for local meat market facilities to be brought up to code. "When the inspectors required stainless steel throughout the market, I figured it would cost twice the money I paid for the business, and I decided to get out," Lueck said.

Interestingly enough, of the 11 area meat markets at that time, only three were left in business after those code requirements were enforced.

Lueck auctioned off the meat market's equipment, but kept the bologna recipe in hopes that he and his son would someday make it, although they never did. Lueck kept ownership of the building, which is where Jimmy's Pizza is currently located, until 1976, when he sold the establishment to Marvin Hirsch of Winsted.

Hirsch then ran a clothing store in that location. His friend, Gene Bayerl, had a grocery store in town called Gene's Grocery.

Hirsch thought someday his friend Gene could possibly make the bologna for the area again so, 25 years ago, Hirsch bought the recipe from Lueck.

"By the time Gene was ready to start making the bologna, he ended up going out of business and never did get to make it," Hirsch said.

"I didn't do anything with that recipe until I sold it to Don (of Grandpa Ittel's Meats) in February," Hirsch said.

Meanwhile, the meat market in Jordan has been making its version of the bologna all these years. After Winsted's City Meat Market went out of business, area residents would drive to Jordan to get their bologna fix.

Schwartz had heard about the Winsted bologna from many customers who wished they could buy it in the area again.

When Hirsch approached Schwartz with the idea of selling the recipe, negotiations ensued, and the recipe was again sold, with the end result of Grandpa Ittel's Meats in Howard Lake now producing and selling the famed bologna.

"I thought it would be more economical to make it than it is. There's no gristle or fat. I spend a lot of time trimming – the inputs are more expensive than I thought," Schwartz laughed.

Schwartz is still trying to balance out the supply and demand for the product. If the meat market runs out of the bologna, it's usually not for more than a day. "I feel bad if I run out and if I have a customer who traveled a distance to get it, so I encourage those traveling a long distance to call first,"

Schwartz said.

More than 90 percent of Grandpa Ittel's customers who remember eating the Winsted bologna say that Ittel's "nailed it," and that it tastes just as good as what they remembered. A new generation is now being exposed to the famous bologna, which is also fun for Schwartz to see.

Schwartz says he's always trying to offer new products, in addition to products the meat market is already known for.

"People always look for nostalgia. They have memories of their mothers buying bologna for the holidays in times when they didn't have a lot of money. Bologna was a real treat back then," Schwartz said.

Grandpa Ittel's Meats is a federally inspected meat market, which means inspections occur on a daily basis. "I believe we're the only federally inspected retail meat market in Wright County," Schwartz said.

"I'm not sorry one bit that I bought it (the recipe)," Schwartz said. "The people who grew up on it are supporting it very well. The biggest challenge is keeping a supply of it on the shelves," he added.

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