

## Scent of Christmas still strong for Cottrellville baker, 90

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The freshly baked aroma of Christmas is still powerful for Jim Dewey, who ran Dewey's Bakery in Cottrellville Township for 22 years in the third quarter of the 20th century.

Dewey, now 90, is still producing an array of baked goods out of the small kitchen in his East China home. By Dec. 5, he had already baked 100 dozen Christmas cookies for friends and family. That's on top of the eight dozen sweet rolls he bakes each month for his church, the Seventh Day Adventists in Marysville, and the four loaves of salt-free and sugar-free bread he bakes weekly for his nearby nephew who helps him around the yard, and the dozens of cinnamon rolls he bakes for the annual family reunion in East China Park.

Dewey and his wife Pansy opened the bakery at 1609 Broadbridge Road in January 1958, and ran it until spring 1980.

"I had worked in a coal yard for 21 years and then it closed," Dewey said, "I had to do something."

Pansy noticed an advertisement in a magazine for a correspondence course offered by the National Baking Institute of Chicago for \$110.

"I took it, but didn't really learn anything," Dewey said.

Instead, he learned the ropes at the Broadway Bakery from Joe Cupica, where he worked for \$1.35 an hour.

Residents have vivid recollections of the bakery.

"He had the best cream bread," said Judy Holland, who grew up in Marine City and owns Perruche salon. "They were really nice and friendly — a family-owned bakery. But the bread was phenomenal. When I was little, we would make a special trip out to Broadbridge Road to buy their baked goods."

"Their eclairs! Apple strudel, oh, and the bread," said Lisa Hendrick, whose mother, Rita Roehrig, sits on the Marine City Commission. "I loved going there. We went to church in Algonac and always stopped there on the way back. We all looked forward to his stuff."

Dewey's secret was wholesome ingredients.

"Nothing was made from mixes, all from scratch, no preservatives, no chemicals," Dewey said. "That's how we did it then."

December was crunch-time in the bakery business.

"Christmas was always the busiest and most fun time of the year," Dewey said.

For the holidays, Dewey baked about 45,000 Christmas cookies, all of which were hand decorated by his daughter, Carol Lee, 58.

"It took hours and hours," Lee said.

"And I was just a small country bakery," Dewey said.

The Warren school district alone would order 400 dozen cookies from the bakery for its students.

"We made stollens, 12 kinds of Christmas cookies, special pies, hundreds of two-and-a-half pound fruit cakes with nuts, glazed pineapple, white raisins and dates, and a four-layer Kris Kringle cake," Dewey said.

"It was more like a torte," Lee said.

The holiday season began at Thanksgiving. Sid's on the Seaway — now McRae's Big River Grill — alone took 85 pumpkin pies for

Thanksgiving. The bakery also did a substantial wholesale business. Henry's, the now-closed destination restaurant in Algonac, bought 100 loaves of pumpernickel bread a week, plus deserts. Tony and Mary Achatz's catering company bought all of their baked goods from Dewey. Margaret Achatz's catering firm bought ten loaves of bread a day. And numerous area churches purchased sweet rolls for their Sunday coffees.

"I used to be able to work and work and work," said Dewey, who worked 24 straight hours every weekend for 22 years getting ready for Sundays, his busiest day of the week.

After Dewey closed the country bakery in 1980, he went to work for daughter Carol, who owned the Sugar Shack in Mio, for eight years until 1983. Dewey continued on at the Shack for a couple of more years with the new owner.

"He taught me well," Lee said. "I'm the only baker River District Hospital ever had."

She baked at the hospital from 1984-1994.

"It was such a pleasure," Lee said. "Everybody said my bread and rolls tasted like my dad's. He's my hero, the best father anyone could have."

Stacks of 33 rpm records line a shelf in Dewey's compact living room.

"We used to have so much fun in the bakery that we didn't know we were working, and we worked hard," Lee said. "We played records all the time. Dad's favorites are Johnny Cash, Pete Fountain and Fats Domino. We've got some of Johnny Cash's original Sun recordings."

Sun Records in Memphis, was the first studio to record Elvis in the mid-1950s and Cash a couple of years later.

"Dad and I liked to work at night when people wouldn't bother us," Lee said. "I used to do my homework on sacks of flour."

Dewey would begin baking at 11 p.m. in the summer and 2 a.m. in the winter. He and his daughter made breads, rolls, cakes, cream puffs with real cream and "every pie known to man."

"Carol could make a pie a minute once the dough was made," Dewey said.

Pies sold for a dollar, bread for 23 cents a loaf, cinnamon rolls for 90 cents a dozen. Pecans were delivered to the bakery 300 pounds at a time at \$1.39 a pound. Swifts Creamery sold Dewey butter in 40-pound blocks.

"We sliced bread with a hand-cranked slicer," Lee said. She would crank with one hand and push a loaf of bread into the slicer with a board. "Then you had to run around real fast to the other side and catch it."

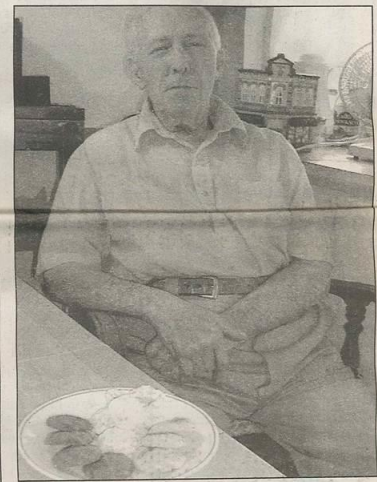
Lee's brother later installed a motor on the slicer.

"That was slick," she said. "My mom wrapped the bread in waxed paper and tied it with a string."

"Plastic bags for the bread weren't even made until a year after we had the bakery," Dewey said. "That was a great labor saver."

Lee, her brother, sister and mom all worked with Dad in the bakery. A year before it opened, Dewey's eldest son died.

Gary Dewey, now in his mid-40s, remembers driving from Detroit up to Marine City with his family as a child for natural-casing hot dogs at Zimmerman's and baked



Above top, Dewey, far right, his father-in-law Clarence Marble and employee Sharon Gonsczak welcome hungry customers to Dewey's Bakery circa 1960. Left, little Jimmy Lee, now a 37-year-old St. Clair resident, helps Grampa Dewey make a strawberry pie in 1972. Right, Dewey offers visitors to his home a plate of old-fashioned Christmas spritzes, both chocolate and plain, and Russian tea cakes.

goods at Uncle Jim's bakery.

"I remember lines of people coming right out of the bakery," Gary said.

Not only the baked goods were handmade; so was the bakery itself.

"I built the building on my own," Dewey said. "I dug the three-and-a-half foot deep trench from the house to the bakery for water. I made the oven, the fryer, the shelves, the display cases, everything in there."

He made the oven?

"I made it over at the blacksmith's shop on West Boulevard," Dewey said. "Mr. Kellogg welded it together for me. It held 40 loaves of bread. Then I bought two commercial three-deck ovens."

"The oven you made out-baked the ovens you bought," his daughter said.

"It would bake everything and would produce steam for the pumpernickel bread and the hard rolls and had an automatic custard maker in it," Dewey said. "I had to mortgage my house to open the place, but once we got rolling, we paid off the debt in three years."

For the first year-and-a-half, Dewey's ovens were fueled by oil, which created an acrid aroma in the bakery. A natural gas line was extended from M-29 west to the bakery in the summer of '59.

"When I got gas, I had it made," Dewey said. "God sent us customers from all over, Port Huron, Richmond, St. Clair, California, Detroit."

"It was always my secret smugness that Rosemary Sanders of the famous Detroit ice cream and bakery family bought all her baked goods from us," Lee said. "She always said our pecan rolls were better than Sanders."

Dewey's father moved nine of his 11 children to Marine City on Dec. 10, 1919, after landing a job as a salt-carter at the long-gone Michigan Salt Works, just north of Cherry Beach. When he was 14, young Jim Dewey took over his dad's job, carting salt from 10 p.m. until 6 a.m., and then heading off to the old Marine City High School on South Main for ninth grade — his last year of formal education. For a nickel,

Dewey's mom would take the electric Interurban streetcar for a three-minute ride from Cherry Beach into Marine City to grocery shop.

"Marine City was a better city then than it is now," Dewey said, counting three dry good stores, four drug stores and four beer gardens in the 1920s. "It was a good downtown."

"When I was growing up, you never had to leave town to buy anything," said Lee.

"We had Miller's and Finsterwald's for clothes, Becker's, Knight's Five and Dime, Kersten's Shoes, two ice cream shops, Bachelor's Appliance, Bridges Jewelry, and Quality Feed, which started out as a grain store, then sold hardware, and later had wonderful furniture."

Dewey and Pansy were married for 59 years, until her death in March 2001, at the age of 85.

"The bakery was a wonderful experience. But it was an old-time thing," Dewey said. "It keeps us thinking about what a change there has been in the world."