

Kensington's Hawkins Produce
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YE, THEY HAVE SOME BANANAS...(AND CORN AND PEACHES AND CRABS AND PETUNIAS...)

Ever dreamed of living the good life on a farm, just steps away from the corn in the field, frost-kissed pumpkins, and fresh turkey for your holiday table?

You don't have to move to the country to eat like a country squire. In fact, there's a little bit of that good life just around the corner right here in the Maryland suburbs at Hawkins' Produce in Kensington.

Located on Knowles Avenue near its intersection with Summit Avenue, Hawkins' Produce has been a neighborhood tradition since Ann and James Hawkins brought the farm to town in October 1980.

Produce, people and fun are the ingredients of Ann and Jimmy Hawkins success. But that success is built on the first three years of touch-and-go commerce when the Hawkins were more concerned about breaking even than about clearing parking lot congestion.

The stand began when Jimmy, who had operated a landscaping service prior to the produce stand, noticed the absence of farm-fresh produce available in the Kensington area. And Ann was just the person to launch the enterprise.

Raised on a North Carolina farm, her love of the earth's bounty encompasses people as well as produce. Ann, the mother of Leroy, Jim Jr., and Joe, started selling apples and cider from a picnic table. The present shed built recently with the help of their good friend David Murphy sheltered not only the produce, but dreams of future improvements.

Over the years, Ann and Jimmy have collected loyal customers and expanded their wares. In addition to fruits and vegetables, Hawkins' carries eggs, McCutcheon's preserves, crab and shrimp in season and fresh bread and croissants from the Jean Jacques Bakery. Customers can order fresh holiday turkeys in the fall.

In the night, Ann turns her hand to advertising as she painting the signs to announce their latest harvest or a special occasion. As a local bulletin board, the Hawkins' signs beat any neon or computer generated advertising. Customers eagerly anticipate the next splash of vibrant color, painted in the best tradition of American folk art, proclaiming the new melon shipment, the appearance of the Easter Bunny or Santa, "Happy Birthday, America," or "Closed for a Long Winters Nap."

Ann and Jimmy are proud that they carry the freshest possible produce. After almost five years, they have developed a network of farmers and wholesalers that enables them to obtain fruit and vegetables from local farms and from farms along the east coast.

The Hawkins fell that their finest harvest has been the friends they have made through their work. Mary Hawley of Kensington was their first customer, is a weekend volunteer at the stand. John Barber designed and donated their sign created the bright blue and white Hawkins tee shirts.

Other regulars at Hawkins' include, of course, the staff – Earle Crouse, and old friend of Jimmy's, and John Hosinski, an 8th grader at Holy Cross School. They unload the trucks, clean and sort, arrange the displays, and monitor Jimmy's house specialty, freshly steamed crab.

Ann and Jimmy credit Jim Barnesley, owner of Wheaton's Country Boy Market, for welcoming them as competitors and teaching them the local business ropes. They are also grateful to their landlord and to the Town of Kensington for believing in their enterprise.

Summing up the Hawkins' business philosophy, Ann says, "We care about our customers and they care about us."

...Diane Ursano