

Family continues to grow, sell produce

By Ron Wilson

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"Home-grown." That's a description of our favorite products from the garden. It also describes a produce business which serves southwest Kansas and developed, quite literally, from the ground up. This remarkable family is still building on the family tradition of produce-growing and customer service. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Traci Savolt, her sister Kelley Bickett and their husbands, with help from sisters Rhonda and Heidi, are owners and operators of Bob Huber Produce in Garden City. The Huber family came from

southwest Kansas where Bob's parents raised and sold produce. Bob Huber Produce dates back to 1979. Bob got fresh produce from Colorado and sold it locally. Then he bought a farm near Holcomb and started growing his own.

Bob and his wife had four daughters and a son, and the children worked alongside them in raising and selling produce. "One of my favorite memories was pulling a wagon around the neighborhood, selling homegrown tomatoes in paper sacks," said Bob Huber's daughter Traci. The kids were close to their parents and worked happily together on the farm.

As the kids grew, so did their responsibilities. "Dad taught me how to drive a tractor, haul and sell," Traci

said. "He always said that he would put up any of his daughters against any of the guys."

The Hubers raised a wide variety of products on their 100 acres near the rural community of Holcomb, population 1,883 people. Now, that's rural.

In 1993, the Hubers built an open air building in Garden City to serve as a roadside stand for their produce. In 1998, they built an enclosed building to do the same across town and eventually consolidated into a single market there. The girls moved into the business full-time. Traci married Tim Savolt and Kelley married Gary Bickett. Now their kids help too.

As Bob got older, Traci and Kelley took on more responsibility for the business. When Traci expressed to

her father how much they needed him, he replied, "You're doing it now. The people love you. You've done this all your life. Keep it up," and she promised that she would. Mrs. Huber passed away in 2008. Bob passed away a year later.

The girls were true to their word and kept the business going. In fact, they added a "to go" food service counter at the market, expecting that customers would buy produce and prepared foods to take with them. Instead, the customers asked to sit and enjoy their meal right there. The sisters put in a table, but people wanted more. Now, Bob Huber Produce and Country Café includes 10 booths for customer seating, with a menu of sandwiches, salads and sides desserts like Grandma's carrot cake.

They've hosted up to 100 people in the building for special events.

During fall pumpkin season, some 2,500 kids will visit the store. Wow.

Bob Huber Produce offers locally grown cantaloupe, watermelon, honeydews, tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, honey, pumpkins, beans, sweet corn and more. Most of these products are raised on their family farm, supplemented with products from other growers.

The sisters have upheld their father's traditions of quality and service. "I have to be sure it's right before I sell it," Traci said. "We'll taste test it. If it isn't good, we won't sell it. And we love our customers, they're like family," she added.

Linda Beech, K-State Research and Extension agent in Finney County,

has seen the business grow firsthand. "The sisters were a delight as they prepared and served our great food," Linda said. "This is a family that very obviously loves working together and they continue to honor their parents' traditions of hard work and good service in a family business that truly is a labor of love."

Home-grown. That's a term which not only describes the locally grown produce sold by the Huber family, it describes this business itself. We commend Traci and Tim Savolt, Kelley and Gary Bickett, and all the family for making a difference by continuing the tradition of truck farming and service.

In operating and expanding this business, they are sticking close to their roots.

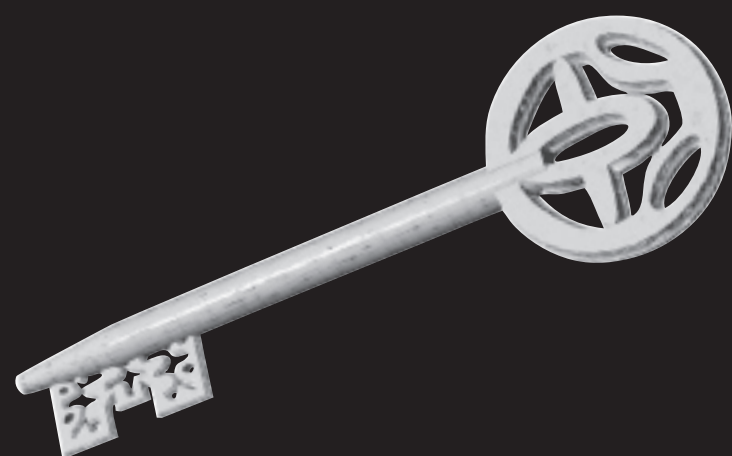
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