

Family business built on peanuts and candy

By Don Dohler

HBL Editor

Downtowners — you know, folks who live and work in Baltimore City — were used to the routine of stopping by a quaint old building on High Street behind the main post office to peruse the goodies offered at the Jeppi Nut & Candy Co.

Inside the doors of Jeppi, visitors would sniff the aroma of roasted peanuts and freshly popped popcorn. And they would find a variety of candies, dried fruits and other delights on the store's shelves.

Since late March, those downtowners now travel to the 'burbs to purchase their favorite Jeppi treats.

Jeppi Nut & Candy moved to a new 4,000-square-foot facility on Aylesbury Road in Timonium, a change company president Ted Pavlos said was necessary.

"The old facility had more square footage, but it was all chopped up in two different buildings and on more than one level," Pavlos said. "We just could not expand our operations there."

So Pavlos, along with sister Marina Lillie, niece Liz Wilcox, semi-retired dad Charlie Pavlos, and 12 employees, relocated the long-standing city business to Baltimore County. The move has been a good one, according to family members and employees.

Lillie, who joined the family business in 1986, said she's a little sad to leave the old place because "I grew up with the business at that location."

But, she's quick to add, "The new location is great — much closer to my home; and I don't miss the heat in the summer and the cold in the winter." The former building, about 100 years old, did not have AC or terrific heat, she said.

Wilcox echoes Lillie: "I love the new location, but I'll always miss the old building and being downtown," she said.

Lillie and Wilcox, aunt and niece respectively, and Lillie's sister (Wilcox's mom), Diane, were the creative force behind designing the store at the new location. It all had to be custom-built from scratch.

"We wanted to retain some of the charm we had at the old location, so Liz and I thought an old-fashioned candy store was the way to go," Lillie said. "Because of Baltimore County regulations, the peanut roasters had to be separated by a wall, so we put glass windows in the store so customers can see the roasters in the next room. That was one of the things people liked at the old location — the roasters were visible from the store."



Photo: Don Dohler

Posing in their new store, the Pavlos family — owners of the Jeppi Nut & Candy Co. — are (from left) Ted Pavlos, president, Liz Wilcox, secretary/treasurer, Charlie Pavlos, who bought and built the business in 1974, and Marina Lillie, vice president. Ted and Marina are Charlie's children; Liz is his granddaughter.

She and Wilcox "had a ball" shopping at auctions and antique stores to find appropriate props and decorations for the new store, Lillie said. "A new counter and several large display units were custom-built for us by a woodworking artist," she added. The new store — a sort of wonderland of goodies for visitors — also features a faux tin ceiling to complete the effect.

Charlie Pavlos purchased Jeppi Nut & Candy from the Claster family in 1974, who had bought it from the original Jeppi family in the late '60s. "It was a run-down company with three employees and one truck in a 3,000-square-foot building when my dad bought it," Ted Pavlos recalls. "He built it up."

That's when Pavlos — at the time a financial manager at Westinghouse — joined his father in the business. "We eventually purchased an adjacent building, and

been upbeat, it arrives on the heels of a sad time a year ago, when Stella Pavlos — Charlie's wife — passed away. Though she was not working the company on a day-to-day basis, Stella and her sisters and sisters-in-law would help out during the holiday crunch every year. "Mom and my aunts

always helped at Christmas," Marina Lillie recalls fondly. "We called them 'The Aunt Brigade'."

Jeppi Nut & Candy will be holding its grand opening in late September. For more about the company, call 410-252-7069 or visit its website: www.jeppi.com

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finally bought the original building from the Claster family," Pavlos said.

In 1978, with the business growing, Pavlos hired a full-time retail manager, Glenn Barnes, who is still with the company 25 years later.

"Ted and his family are great people to work for," Barnes said. "They treat their employees more than fair, and that makes it a joy — instead of a pain — to go to work every day."

Barnes, who is charge of the beautiful new store in Timonium, said he's very happy about the move. "I love working in this new location," he said. "And most of our old customers drive here from the city, and at the same time we're getting many new customers who live out in the county."

Pavlos estimates the remodeling of the new location has cost \$300,000, which includes some new equipment and refurbishing all of the old equipment. The building has been divided into four sections: the store, administrative offices, a large warehouse, and a production area with four roasters and packaging equipment.

While the retail store is a significant part of the Jeppi revenue flow, Pavlos said that wholesale makes up most of Jeppi's business. "Wholesale is about 80 percent," he said. "We sell our products to stores all over region, and we're the main supplier of peanuts to vendors at Camden Yards."

The company also is a leading supplier of concession equipment and supplies for popcorn, cotton candy, snowballs and nachos — as well as a full line of baking supplies.

Jeppi has many Harford County customers — Aberdeen Proving Ground, Harford Grocery, Village Video and several swim clubs among them.

"Our biggest products are peanuts in the shell and popcorn," Pavlos said.

The busiest time of the year for Jeppi, of course, is September through December. Aside from regular retail, corporate gifts are huge during the holidays, said Lillie, who is in charge of the corporate gift line. "Companies come to us to order gifts for their clients," she said. "We coordinate all that, and do all the shipping for them." Lillie, who joined brother Ted and dad Charlie in the business after college to "decide what I wanted to do with my life," ended up enjoying the family business so much that she never pursued her college major: psychology. She is vice president of Jeppi, and does accounting "and a little bit of everything."

Niece Liz Wilcox, a Fallston resident, joined Jeppi last September. Wilcox brings a new dimension to the business: she graduated from the Culinary Institute of New York in 1998 and attained a degree in pastry in 1999. She was the pastry chef at the Center Club downtown before joining Jeppi last year. "I love working here," she said. "It's a lot of fun because it's so diverse — there are just so many different facets to the business that it's never dull."

Wilcox, the company secretary-treasurer, also assists in placing candy orders, helps develop new recipes, and is now teaching cooking classes to customers. "I show people how to use ingredients in baking," she said. "People often just don't know what to do with nuts and other ingredients, and that's where I help them."

Though the move to a new facility has



Photo: Don Dohler

TOP: Glenn Barnes, retail manager for Jeppi Nut & Candy Co., has been with the company for 25 years — the longest tenure of any non-family member. Barnes runs the retail store with assistant Tim Krometis. ABOVE: Quincy Powers, the warehouse manager at Jeppi, lifts a load of raw peanuts using a forklift. Powers has the third longest tenure with the company — just behind delivery manager John Teufel.