



Brown Deer Historical Society, Inc.

NEWSLETTER



Upcoming Meeting

Date:

Thursday, April 25, 2013

Time:

6:30 pm Board of Directors

7:00 pm General Membership

Where: (note new location)

Community Room

4355 West Bradley Road

Brown Deer, WI

Program: Show & Tell

Open to all members! Bring an artifact, photo, antique to show!

Open To the Public and Society Membership

Brown Deer Historical Society

Board of Directors

Officers

Joseph Klucarich	President
Rose Klucarich	Vice President
Robert Moranski	Treasurer
Kathleen Schilz	Secretary /Editor

Directors-at-Large

Barbara Bechtel	Ellen Burmeister
Tim Schilz	Bernice Knurr
LeRoy Knurr	Dorothy Kittleson
Mary Buckley	Barry Godshaw

Submit any newsletter articles or historical acquisitions to:

Kathleen E. Schilz
6543 W. Floral Lane
Brown Deer, WI 53223

browndeerhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
414-355-4182

LARRY'S BROWN DEER MARKET

Retired for 25 years, Larry Ehlers continues to be a presence at the specialty food store that bears his name, Larry's Brown Deer Market. Ehlers has been part of the Brown Deer scene since he was born.

According to his birth certificate, that was on

March 1, 1924, but the date is not exactly correct. "I was really born on Feb. 29, but they put March 1 on the birth certificate," Ehlers recalls. One of four children, including a twin brother, he and the siblings grew up in a house on what is now called River Lane, not far from the store. A cousin now owns the house. For those without a lot of knowledge of the history of the area, River Lane was once Brown Deer Road. Deerwood Drive, the site of the store, was Green Bay Road.



Ehlers has strong memories of growing up in what is now called the Original Village. "I remember coming through the field to the store for my mother," he said. "We could see the store from a window in our house." He was about six at the time. "We used to be able to go down to the old bridge, over the Milwaukee River, and go swimming," Ehlers said, remembering what seems like an idyllic childhood in the small community that preceded the incorporation of the village of Brown Deer in the 1950s.

The Brown Deer School was in the village. The building is now part of a church. "We had swings, slides, teeter-totters and if you fell off, too bad!" he said. In a more simple time, he remembers sneaking into the school through an open window during a Fourth of July parade. He and a friend were up to mischief, putting spit balls around in a classroom and taking some pencils. The return of the school principal broke up their adventure into "showing those teachers." In their haste to leave, they left their bikes, leading the principal to them.

Although not very successful at playing pranks in schools, Ehlers had a touch of genius when it came to what became his store. He started working there when he was 16 years old, in 1940. "I would carry out the garbage, sweep the floors, sort bottles," he said. At that time, the store was a general store with a soda fountain. "There was an ice man who came and brought big blocks of ice," he said. "The only refrigeration in the store was the meat cooler." Ehlers continued to work at the store while he attended Marquette University for two years. In 1943 he joined the Navy and became part of a group working on ground control approach, using radar. After his stint in the Navy was up, he returned to the store, although unwillingly. "I didn't want to come back here to work," he said. "My twin brother was working here and he got the measles so I agreed to come and help."

He left a second time to work as a salesman for Arctic Foods, one of the earliest frozen food companies in the area, but came back after two years. The store's clientele numbered some of the oldest - and wealthiest - families in the area, households where, through the 1960s, a butler, cook and maid were commonly employed. As corner groceries gave way to supermarkets and the economy and the grocery business changed, Larry's customers continued to shop at the store as it gradually switched from grocery store to gourmet food store. Some small changes started in the 1960s, when Larry, as the store manager, worked with the former owners to add fresh cut flowers, frozen foods and other perishable items to the stock. Remembering those changes, he said, "I always got excited about new things."

(continued on page 3)

2013 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 256:30 pmBoard of Director's meeting followed by 7:00 pm **General Meeting** and Show & Tell Presentation
April 278:00 am**Open House** at the 1884 Little White Schoolhouse and Deer Run for the Brown Deer Foundation
June 196:00 pm**Open House** at the 1884 Little White Schoolhouse and "Community Vibes", Music in Village Park
July 43:00 pm.....**Open House** at the 1884 Little White Schoolhouse and
July 176:00 pm**Open House** at the 1884 Little White Schoolhouse and "Community Vibes", Music in Village Park
July 256:30 pm.....Board of Director's meeting
August 216:00 pm.....**Open House** at the 1884 Little White Schoolhouse and "Community Vibes", Music in Village Park
October 24.....6:30 pm.....Board of Director's meeting followed by 7:00 pm **Annual Membership** meeting and Elections

LARRY'S BROWN DEER MARKET (continued from page 1) by Mary Buckley

Ehlers married his wife Carol in 1948. She played an important role in the store, keeping the books and paying the bills. "I used to bring the money home," he said. "She counted it and took care of the bills. I came home one day to some new furniture and asked her where we got the money for it." Carol had an explanation. It was her money, she said. "She said she threw the money I brought home up in the air. What goes on the table is yours, what goes on the floor is mine," Ehlers recalled. After working for three owners, Ehlers bought the market in 1970. In 1971 Carol purchased two tickets for the Fancy Food Show in New York City. Ehlers, who was working six days a week from dawn to dusk, didn't think he should go, but Carol ran the store, while Ehlers and his son Steve went to New York City. It was a trip that would change the business. "Steve had taken two trips to Europe and he suggested I get involved in French cheeses," Ehlers said. He went to New York City with a small budget for cheese.



"I allowed myself \$100 to spend on something I knew nothing about," he said. Steve, who with his wife Cindy now owns the store, spoke French to the cheese seller. They all became life long friends. Although the first cheese was ordered in June, it did not arrive until just before Labor Day weekend in 1971. (Refrigeration was not what it is nowadays.) "We were sold out in a few days," Ehlers said. First came the cheese - and then, in the history of the transition from grocery to gourmet food store, the February 1972 open house and introduction of Ile de France cheese. "I wanted to invite people to a party to thank them for staying with the store after I bought it," he said. The food editors from the Milwaukee Journal and Milwaukee Sentinel termed the party the society event of the year. Telefood magazine used the gathering as its featured cover article calling it the food event of the year.



Gourmet cheeses became a staple of the market. The catering business started when a regular customer called asking for a cheese tray. Her husband was bringing unexpected guests home for dinner. Could Larry do a cheese tray?

He had never done one, but looked in his Telefood magazine and put one together, including crackers, fruit and toothpicks with silk ribbon and labels identifying the cheese. The labels evolved into the paper flags that now signal the national origin of cheeses on the market's cheese trays. Ehlers wore what has become his signature beret for that party. "Steve brought that home for me from one of his trips," Ehlers said. "Tim Murphy of Telefood magazine said I should always wear that, it was my trademark." There were other changes, too. The store had long had a butcher shop, located in what is now the deli area. After Ehlers bought the store, it became evident that the small deli operation was pushing out the butcher. The expanded deli draws customers for lunch. The cheese trays and deli also helped the evolution into catering and gift baskets.

Son Steve inherited his father's genius for making strategic changes, adding the hugely popular Friday cook outs in warmer weather, along with indoor seating a few years ago. Ehlers moved to Cedarburg when his family, wife Carol and sons Steve and Jeff and daughter Patty, was young. He continues to live there, although he spends some time in the winter in Florida and at Wolf Lake in the summer. Wearing his beret and apron, he continues to be a presence at the store, when he is in town, greeting customers and ringing up sales. The village's Fourth of July Committee has named Ehlers the marshal for the Independence Day parade, a recognition of a man whose contributions to the village spans decades.