Wishek: Famous for Sausage and Sauerkraut

By Annie Bennett, Clearwater Communications

The small town of Wishek, located in south central North Dakota in the heart of Germans-from-Russia country, has quite a reputation for only having a population of 1,200 people. For generations, this small town has attracted people from across the country, thanks to its famous sausage and sauerkraut.

The Famous Wishek Sausage

Stan’s Sausage, the Early Years

Walking into Stan’s Super Valu in Wishek, it looks like a typical small-town grocery store. The shelves are neatly stocked with everything from diapers to cereal; the staff is busy running the cash register and helping carry out groceries. However, it is the back of the store at the meat counter where the action is. It seems like there is always someone there, visiting with the staff or stocking up on the store’s famous homemade sausage.

Stan’s Super Valu has been making its famous sausage, along with many other meat products, since it opened in 1962. The same recipe, which only a handful of people know, has been used for the last 54 years and dates back to the early 1900s. Darren Deile, the current owner of Stan’s Super Valu and lifelong Wishek resident, started working at Stan’s as soon as he was old enough to work. Deile’s father, Stan, started the store with Jim Klundt in 1962 after leaving the former Herr Mercantile store. The two opened a Red Owl grocery store. It was then this duo started making sausage in their store. In 1979, the store moved into the building it is still in today and in the late 1980s, Red Owl was bought out by Super Valu, and the store became what is still known as Stan’s Super Valu.

A Loyal Employee

Stan’s Super Valu is known across the Midwest for its sausage, especially the country sausage and ring bologna. One of the few people who know the recipe for these famous treats is employee George Just. Just was hired as a meat cutter by the founders when they opened the store. Now 79 years old and still an employee, Just says, “Working at Stan’s gives me something to do. It is what I know and what I really enjoy.” Just says he has no plans to retire. “I plan to be here until they tell me I can’t work here anymore or until the good Lord doesn’t let me,” he jokes.

“George comes in every morning around 5:30 a.m. and seasons the meat for the day,” says Deile. “He is an ageless, quick and tough man, who very dedicated.” Just works at the store until 9 a.m., before heading to volunteer at the local golf course in the summer and the
bowling alley in the winter. “Of course, there is a coffee break in there, too,” laughs Just. He says he still eats the sausage, and like many others, his favorite is the country-style sausage.

Making the Meats

It takes a lot of work to make Stan’s famous sausage. Currently, Willis Caldwell, Brittney Njos, Char Wald and Just, who make up the meat department staff, put in roughly 170 hours a week. Deile says he couldn’t ask for a more loyal, hardworking and dedicated staff. “They work hard and do a great job of running all facets of the department. The business wouldn’t be nearly as successful if it wasn’t for the current staff,” says Deile.

Deile has two smokehouses to keep up with the demand. The larger smokehouse can make 300 pounds of sausage at a time, and the smaller can make 150 pounds. On average, the store makes 3,500 pounds of sausage per week. “We do very little marketing, because the product sells itself,” says Deile. In addition to the country sausage and ring bologna, liver sausage, summer sausage and head cheese are popular sellers. “Head cheese is definitely a local favorite,” he says. “It is a regional delicacy, although some companies produce and sell it nationally.” Head cheese is traditionally a meat jelly made from the head of a pig, but today is made from pork rind and cooked pork, which is ground together, then seasoned, cooked, stuffed and left to cool and jell. The entire process takes about 24 hours. In addition to these local favorites, Stan’s also makes a variety of other products, including jerky, bratwurst and beef sticks.

“It is really fun to talk with the customers when they come into the store, especially the ones that travel just to come to our store,” says Deile. “A lot of those that travel have ties to the area. It is fun to hear their stories, share their memories and listen to them reminisce about when they were younger and came into the store.”

Famous Across the Country

Due to the popularity of his products extending far outside of Wishek, Deile sells and ships the meats outside the store.

He is also proud his products have been sold to people in all 48 contiguous states. All products can be shipped across the county from November to March; however, they cannot be shipped during the warmer months or to Alaska and Hawaii.

Stan’s Super Valu is located at 1112 Beaver Avenue in Wishek and is open Monday to Friday from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. To find out more or to place an order, call 701-452-2351 or visit www.wisheksausage.com.

Stan’s Famous Meats

Stan’s offers many varieties of delicious meats, including:

Ring Bologna $5.99/pound
Country-Style Fry Sausage – smoked $4.99/pound
Country-Style Fry Sausage – unsmoked $4.49/pound
All-Beef Fry Sausage $7.69/pound
Sauerkraut Sausage $5.79/pound
Bulk Country-Style Fry Mix $4.39/pound
Head Cheese $7.99/pound
Liver Sausage $7.99/pound
Summer Sausage $7.99/pound
Beef Jerky $15.99/pound
Turkey Jerky $14.99/pound
Beef Sticks $12.99/pound
Pepper Jack/Cheddar $12.99/pound
Smoked Bratwurst $5.49/pound
Jalapeno & Jack Bratwurst $5.49/pound
Pork Cheddar Bratwurst $5.49/pound
Fresh Bratwurst $4.99/pound
Walking into the Wishek Civic Center on Sauerkraut Day is quite an adventure. From the buzz of people, the Wishek High School Band playing ‘Sauerkraut’ instead of ‘Tequila,’ and cabbages decorated by local students, to the announcer saying “the line is half way to Linton” and, of course, fermented cabbage, it is a sight, and a smell, to behold.

Sauerkraut Day is an annual event held every October to celebrate this traditional German favorite. During this event, many different activities are held throughout the day, including a craft fair and bingo. Sauerkraut, speck (pork/bacon fat), hot dogs (locally known as wiens), mashed potatoes, dinner rolls and cheese slices are served in the Civic Center from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. More than 100 pounds of sauerkraut, as well as 200 pounds of speck and 500 pounds of Cloverdale hot dogs, are served to the 1,200 people who eat at the Civic Center, as well as the local schools, nursing home and hospital.

James Tuchscherer and his wife Gerd, residents of Rugby, have been coming to Sauerkraut Day for six years. “When I walk in the door at the Civic Center and smell the sauerkraut, I start to salivate with anticipation,” Tuchscherer says.

The idea for Sauerkraut Day began in 1925 when Wishek business owners decided to host an event that would give back to members of the community and show them how much they appreciate their support.

While the concept behind the event, and the fact that everything remains free, is still the same today, a few things have changed over the past 91 years. In 1925, the setup...
was a bit different. Locals would drive their horses and buggies to the town hall and get their food from a small window. “It was similar to the present-day drive-thru,” says Kelly Brown, president of Wishek’s Association of Commerce.

Today, people come from all over the country for the event, and the line gets long very quickly. This year, someone was in line to eat at 10 a.m. “On years when the weather is warm, the line will wrap around the building,” says Brown. The Tuchscherers left their house at 4:30 a.m. and drove through sleet and snow to enjoy Sauerkraut Day and to buy Stan’s Super Valu’s famous country-style sausage. In past years, they even brought their camper and camped, in hopes of being first in line. Tuchscherer says he looks forward to coming to the event every year. “The people in the area take such pride in the event. It is a great turnout and they always serve great sauerkraut.”

Wishek’s famous sauerkraut is made by Leroy and Pat Wanner, a father and son team who have been making sauerkraut for this special event for the last 45 and 30 years, respectively. “It is amazing. They make the sauerkraut in huge pots at City Hall,” says Brown. “The mashed potatoes are made at the nursing home because it has the only kitchen in town large enough to make that many.” The nursing home dietary staff is joined by the hospital dietary staff to make enough mashed potatoes for the feast. “Once prepared, the kraut and fixings, as well as the potatoes, are transported around town in the Kraut Mobile,” says Brown.

Dedicated Community Volunteers

Brown, born and raised in Wishek, played in the band and participated in the choir at Sauerkraut Day when she attended Wishek High School. Now, she is on the other side of the event and has enjoyed her second year being on the Sauerkraut Day committee. “It is great to see how everyone comes together,” she says. “There is so much that goes into the event that goes unnoticed.” For example, volunteers work very hard to help set up chairs, make sure there is enough food, clean up following the event and make sure the town is clean to welcome all its guests. “We schedule many volunteers, but many more just show up the day of the event because they know these things just need to get done.”

“This event is something everyone should experience, especially right now, when there is such negativity in the world,” Brown says. “There are all different walks of life in our country, but this day brings together so many people, all coming together with one goal in mind – to come together and be friendly.”

For more information on Sauerkraut Day or the community of Wishek, visit www.wishek-nd.com.