

## Meat Market Welcomes Competition Business Examiner 2004

Between the Tumwater brewery and the rest of the city's retail strip, Western Meats stands virtually alone on Capital Way, an old-fashioned butcher looking to keep current in a changing city.

"We have seen a huge growth in the area," says owner Dennis Mydlar. "Houses are going up everywhere, and we're getting more customers as a result."

The reason, he says, is the quality of the product the company offers. Western Meats began as a meat wholesaler supplying restaurants, but has expanded its customer base to the point that now it is a 50-50 mix of wholesale and retail.

A pastoral mural on its outside wall and a large cow-shaped sign complimented by a notice promoting buffalo T0bones identify Western Meats as a part of the rural West.

On the opposite of the street and a short drive away is Tumwater Valley Athletic Club, but neither health-consciousness nor competition from Fred Meyer and Costco on nearby Littlerock Road have hurt Western Meats. The store is seeing more traffic, not less, says Mydlar.

"They are brought in (to the area) by the bigger stores," Mydlar says of customers, "but they see us here and come in."

Mydlar, who took over the business from his father, also named Dennis, about a year ago, has been working at Western Meats for 18 years.

"We have a lot of high-quality meat and some different things that other stores don't," he says. "Since we opened up on Sundays about a month ago, we are seeing a whole new group of customers who didn't know about us"

One of the reasons new customers give for stopping is – believe it or not – concern over mad cow disease. All 12 Western Meats employees have been trained in meat safety and mad cow disease, Mydlar boasts.

"Customers come in with questions, because they know we have the training and we are able to answer them," he says. They usually end up buying something – it's usually beef."

But Western Meats' products line includes more than slabs of meat. The shop sells prepared dishes, such as Piroshkis and beef Wellington, which Mydlar says are among the business's most popular products.

The shop also sells sausages made by Western Meats, but not the one in Tumwater – the Tumwater store buys its sausage from a company with the same name in Everett.

“Instead of getting upset about the fact we both chose the same name,” says Mydlar, “we’re working together.”

Western Meats – the one in Tumwater – supplies restaurants in Thurston County and in Centralia and Chehalis, together considerable shore of its market.

“I’ve been buying my meat products from Western Meats since I opened my first business in 1972,” says Dennis Gard, owner of the Brewery City Pizza Chain. “We have developed extreme loyalty between the two businesses. They give excellent service, fair pricing, and I trust them.”

In addition to expanding in to the retail market, which requires less paperwork than wholesale, Mydlar says, Western Meats is strengthening a historical bond with the area’s farming industry.

“We recently started doing some custom cutting for farms,” says Mydlar, “and I would really like to get more in that. We want to do more retail, but the custom cutting is something else we’d like to do more of.”

He confides, however, that working with a perishable product can make accurate ordering difficult, he adds. Sometimes, factors beyond Western Meats’ control can mean the difference between success and failure.

“Like Easter,” says Mydlar. “We usually sell about 300 bone-in hams, so we expected about the same. Then it was such nice weather that weekend everyone wanted to barbecue. We didn’t sell the hams, but we sold more other stuff.”