

Weiland's Market

A Clintonville Institution

By Nancy McKibben

It's 10am at Weiland's. A vibrant produce aisle beckons, meat cases gleam and red-shirted employees are poised to help. A middle-aged gentleman stirs a cup of coffee provided by the store, then waves at the store manager, Steve Hunt.

"Hey, Baldy," he says affably.

"Hey, More Baldy," Steve returns, smiling. As we adjourn to Steve's neat and tiny office, he offers me a thumbnail sketch of the customer. "Raising his grandkids. A greeter at school. Handyman."

And that is the heart of Weiland's. Beautiful food and legendary customer service, manifested not just as a store slogan, but through a deeply ingrained store culture that stretches both ways across the grocery aisle.

"Sometimes it's like the customers think that Weiland's is their store, too," says Jennifer Bowman, who with her husband Scott owns Weiland's. "I was surprised at the depth of loyalty."

It was John Williams, Jennifer's father, who created this legacy. John passed away on June 1, at age 78; 600 customers paid tribute to him in the store's condolence book. Their words, italicized throughout this article, help tell his story.

Three Generations of Grocers

"We always appreciated John's friendly attitude towards everyone! The whole staff reflects John's outlook."—Terry and family

"John is a role model for business with joy and generosity. He was a special guy."—Lisa

John Williams was born in Columbus in 1938, the third generation of grocers in an era when nobody worried about observing child labor laws or achieving a work/life balance. Weiland's Fine Meats opened at the present site of Rite Rugs on Beaumont and High Streets on June 16, 1961, named

after John's partner, George Weiland, to avoid confusion with Williams Market, owned by John's parents.

In 1962, the store moved to Indianola Avenue and Garden Street (now Savor Pint), where it eventually expanded to three storefronts. But the original Weiland's was small and specialized. Sawdust covered the floor, and full front and hindquarters of beef were delivered and hung in the cooler, later broken down by George and John on a long, butcher block table (see page 59).

Today that table sits behind the Weiland's cheese counter, where cheese specialist Kent Rand runs his hands over the dips in the wood, worn down by years of cleaver whacking bone. "Now I teach my cheese-making classes on this table," he says. "It's an honor."

Jennifer remembers coming to the closed store on Sundays to play while her dad worked on the books. "I couldn't work in the store until I was in high school," she says, "Dad didn't want me to hear the language the meat cutters used. Of course, he talked that way himself."

When Jennifer met Scott Bowman, an Ohio State student working part-time as a meat cutter, romance blossomed among the deli salads. "The first time Scott asked me out, he called me on a pay phone," Jennifer says, laughing. "He didn't want to call me from the store where my dad might overhear."

A Neighborhood Destination

"We have been customers of Weiland's for almost 40 years. John was a character in the best sense of the word. Cheerful, helpful and a great neighbor for Clintonville."—Don and Diane

"John instantly made me feel welcome when I first moved to the area. He was a bright light on a dark day."—Pam

Some 60-year-olds anticipate retirement. John celebrated by moving Weiland's in 1999 to its present location at 3600 Indianola, once an IGA

Opposite: From the old days at Weiland's Market



Left: Jennifer and Scott Bowman of Weiland's; Right: John Williams of Weiland's.

and Super-Duper. Business manager Sheila Hunt started that year as a bookkeeper.

"John was a father figure," Sheila says. "He wasn't a direct manager, but he walked around the store and got to know everyone. He cared about you."

Also in 1999, catering manager Steve Panico came to Weiland's from Schmidt's in German Village.

"John was extremely supportive and encouraging about the growth of the catering business," Steve says. "He was always up for a challenge, always the first to jump in whenever needed. And he always treated us very fairly," providing health insurance, 401k and other benefits.

Weiland's now caters 30–50 events per month, not only preparing and cooking all food at the store—or at the event, if you prefer—but also providing amenities from cutlery to tents, at events ranging from corporate galas to hog roasts.

"Weiland's is a unique kind of store that just doesn't exist anymore," Steve says, then glances outside. "John has been gone since June, but I still expect him to walk through the door."

The Fourth Generation

"What a wonderful, engaging man he was—that smile!"—Katy

"I loved John's spunk. My favorite memory of him is the day he flew past me wielding a baseball bat! He was chasing a much younger man who had stolen meat from the butcher. He got the meat back. I think he was in his 70s then."—Elise

After much angst and soul-searching, Jennifer and Scott offered to buy the store in 2011 when John was diagnosed with heart problems. He agreed.

Twenty years in corporate America had made them eager for change, but "I cannot overemphasize how little we knew about retail," Jennifer says. They learned fast, first hiring Steve Hunt, a former employee, as business manager.

"This place has always been close to my heart," he says. "John was one of the best folks I've ever worked with."

With new owners and management, Weiland's changed. Linoleum replaced carpet. Refrigeration cases and equipment were updated. Store layout improved. Product selection increased. Organic and non-GMO offerings joined old-school staples like ham salad.

“Weiland’s is a unique kind of store that just doesn’t exist anymore...”



The long butcher block that sits behind the Weiland’s cheese counter.

The closure of the neighboring hair salon had added 200 square feet for a beer and liquor department in 2006. Now an on-premise liquor license allows for beer pours and wine tastings.

Employee count rose above 80, including four full time in the spirits department; three in the wine department; 14 in the kitchen doing retail, hot case, prepared and catered foods; and eight managing departments.

Kent studied for and passed the certified cheese professional exam. “I wanted to better myself, to live up to John’s high expectations of me,” he says.

John graciously stepped back from running the store, supporting Jennifer and Scott’s business decisions. Although hampered by illness, he continued to bag groceries, cut and wrap cheese and chat with employees and customers, keeping his fingers on the pulse of the store. Only in the last months of his life did illness keep him away.

I never knew John Williams, but I met him in the words of his customers, his employees and his family, all of whom he counted as friends.

The store he built still stands and serves. This comment from his condolence book best expresses his intangible legacy:

“I am a physician at Riverside and I’ve had the honor of taking care of John. I mentioned to him that one of my friends in college worked at Weiland’s. Not only did he recognize my friend’s name, he knew his whole life story! It amazed me that he knew so much about a kid that worked for him for a couple years, many years ago. He truly cared about my friend, just like he clearly cared about his business, his employees and this community.”

**Weiland’s Market; 3600 Indianola Ave, Columbus, OH 43214;
614-267-9878; weilandsmarket.com.**



Nancy McKibben is happy to combine her loves of eating and writing with the opportunity to advocate for sustainable agriculture in the pages of *Edible Columbus*. Her latest project is *Kitschy Cat Alphabet*, a rhyming alphabet book in postcards. She is also a novelist, poet and lyricist, the mother of six, and the wife of one. View her work at nancymckibben.com; contact her at nmckibben@leader.com.



George Weiland

Hello!

You're invited to shop Columbus' Newest Quality Meat Shop . . . Weiland's . . . at 4681 N. High in Beechwold Center. Come in and say "Hello" to George Weiland and John Williams. Listed below are just a few of the Special Fine Food items offered at Weiland's June 15-16-17.



John Williams

Open Daily 8 a.m. - 7 p.m. -- Friday 'til 8 p.m.

4681 North High Street -- Beechwold Center -- Park In Rear



Finest Quality

Ground Chuck

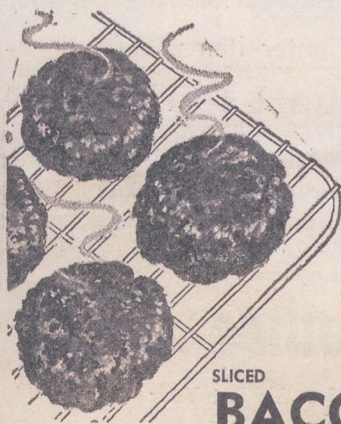
Best For Charcoal Broiling

59^c lb.

TENDERLOINS

Delicious, Tender,
Juicy, 3-5 lb. avg.

89^c lb.



SLICED

BACON

Decker's
Hickory
Smoked

49^c lb.

Weiland's
Delicatessen Delicacies

Homemade

Baked Beans

49^c lb.

Homemade

POTATO SALAD

49^c lb.



Another Outdoor Grill
Special
All Meat

WIENERS

59^c lb.

FREE

Buns with each purchase
(reserve right to limit)

BOWMAN

Cottage Cheese

Reg. 31c
12 oz. Size

5c OFF

Reg. 62c
2 lb. Size

10c OFF

Weiland's

Fine
Meats

4681 North High Street

Phone 267-9878

Plenty of Free Parking In Rear . . . Enter From W. Beaumont