

Mennonite store provides options

Locals appreciate the relaxed grocery store atmosphere

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
Staff Reporter

This isn't your typical grocery store.

Countryside Market, minutes north of Wal-Mart, resembles an old-time general store, with hay bales and a few homemade wooden benches littering the front porch. The bags of grains and beans aren't stamped with a brand logo. They're kept in simple plastic bags with a humble store label on the front. The girl running the cash register wears no name tag or store uniform — but her white cap and old-fashioned dress identify her as a Mennonite.

The demand for Nathan Byers' homemade cabinets was slowing, so he opened Countryside Market in 2008 as another source of income. All of Nathan's family members occasionally work in the store. The Byers' Mennonite heritage reveals itself through the comforting hymns ringing through the store and the Amish-style salsas and sauces on the shelves.

"Some say it's relaxing to come out here," Danelle Byers said, who has worked at the store since it opened. "Some like a smaller place. Some people really like it when we take the time to talk to them."

Checking out customers is Danelle's favorite part of the job. Her cheerful eyes watch a full range of people coming through the store. Most shoppers enjoy a good, long chat with Danelle and Nathan. Danelle jokes that her father converses so long that she has to do his work for him.

The owner of Manhattan Café, a favorite "regular," used to visit the market for baked goods before his café closed.

"One thing he always said when he was going out the door was, 'Have a blessed day,'" she said. "It was always a day-maker."

Although the shelves contain a few typical "grocery store" brands, such as Dannon yogurt, the Byers purchase most products in bulk and package them into small quantities for sale, which usually brings down prices. If you ask Nathan and Danelle where a product came from, they can tell you, unlike workers in a typical grocery store. Most

products are shipped from a Pennsylvania bulk food company called Dutch Valley, which has sources from many Midwestern vendors. But the Byers sell local products whenever possible to avoid high shipping costs.

"If we can get it in the Midwest and avoid shipping, we do," Nathan Byers said.

And, true to his word, milk from Rutledge cows, eggs from local chicken farms and sorghum from a nearby community populate the shelves.

Although some frequent visitors dub it "the Mennonite store," Nathan said the store has nothing to do with the religion. True, Mennonites run similar stores all across the country, but these nooks aren't necessarily a Mennonite tradition. The stores simply offer Mennonites — a family-oriented tradition — a practical way to make a living. Local stores such as Countryside Market usually keep business in the family, Nathan said, which explains their popularity among Mennonites.

Danelle said she can't imagine working without her family, although everyone occasionally gets on each other's nerves. "It's more comfortable to work with family partly because you have grown up together, and you have to be a little quicker to forgive," she said.

Danelle describes her tightly knit childhood as a team effort — a tradition passed down from her dad



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Countryside Market sells locally produced foods, Amish-style salsa, sauces and flowers. A Mennonite family owns and runs the grocery store.

to her and maybe someday to her children.

"My dad grew up on a farm, so he grew up knowing what it's like having family [around] all the time," she said. "It wasn't like his dad went off and did this and everybody went off and did their own thing."

The family sticks close together so they can ultimately help each other through their spiritual journeys, she said. Because

Danelle isn't guaranteed heaven just because her parents are righteous, her family must teach her the values of living every day as a Mennonite.

"It's as if we were on a sinking ship, and we're going down, and there's one boat that can save everybody who will take the opportunity," she said. "I won't be saved from the sinking ship just because my parents decided to hop on the boat that's saving

the people. I'm going to have to hop on by myself."

Kirksville resident Melissa Johnson recently visited Countryside Market for the first time to purchase wheat and yeast for baking bread. She came because she could find the ingredients she needed in bulk, which she couldn't have done in another store.

"It's good to support local business," she said. "We don't have to buy everything from Wal-Mart."

Students create majors to suit interests

Interdisciplinary majors help students with wide areas of curiosity

BY BETHANY COURY
Assistant Features Editor

Junior Devin Ozkal began his freshman year undeclared, looking for a major that suited him. He found none.

When he discovered Truman's interdisciplinary studies program, he talked to Dr. Michael Kelrick, the program's director, and began creating his own major: Middle Eastern studies.

"I have a family connection to it, because I'm half-Turkish," Ozkal said. "My dad came here from Turkey, so the area has at least always interested me. So majoring in it seems nice, because it's like I'm learning about my family."

He began the creation process the fall semester of his sophomore year when he took the first of the two required classes for this program, Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies. He worked closely that semester with Dr. Sara Orel, at the time a member of the Interdisciplinary Studies Oversight Committee, formulating a proposal to submit to the IDSOC. The acceptance

of his proposal, about one week after his submission, marked his enrollment into the program.

"I really like the program — being able to design your own major — because I didn't want to be stuck with something I didn't want to do," Ozkal said. "I probably would have ended up doing a history major, but that doesn't cover everything I want to do."

The proposal for an interdisciplinary studies major consists of an explanation of the intended major and a schedule of courses offered at Truman that will construct the curriculum. The explanation portion states the major's focus and argues for its legitimacy as a major. The schedule of classes must include a minimum of 36 credit hours — 27 of which are at a 300+ level, the second required class — Interdisciplinary Studies Capstone — and a fallback plan in case any courses are no longer offered in the future.

Professor Aaron Fine, a cur-

rent member of the IDSOC, reviews these proposals and often returns them with revisions. He said they don't intend to consistently reject proposals, but he emphasized the importance of a clear, focused proposal, saying that if a student can't create one, then he probably doesn't know exactly what he wants.

"It's not some 'random studies major,'" Fine said. "It is a real, focused pursuit that just doesn't happen to be covered by a major we have here at Truman, and often is combining majors. The IDSOC simply makes sure that there are real academic standards involved."

Fine also said the IDSOC is wary of proposals that are specified to the point of being pre-professional majors rather than liberal arts, and the main focus of the committee is on discouraging any IDSMs that could be satisfied within any already established discipline at Truman.

"For us to approve a packet is

that it truly represents something that a student can't reasonably get some other way at Truman," Fine said. "It represents a discipline that doesn't exist already. So if we determine that you could have done that by getting an English major and a sociology minor or something, then that's what we encourage people to do."

However, Sara Clark, a junior with an IDSM in American studies, said having to revise your proposal is not a rejection, but rather constructive.

"It was more like a helpful process," Clark said. "I don't think it's negative if you get turned down the first time — it means you're making improvements to [the proposal]. And I think that's generally how it goes, with some kind of revision."

Clark, an aspiring professor, said that all the schools she looked into had the American studies degree, but she felt Truman was a good fit for her. She came to Truman as a history major, contemplated visual communications and English, and probably would have ended up as a double major with something she wasn't as happy with, she said. But after her first semester, she realized she only wanted to teach American history courses and had little interest in many of the requirements

within the history major, she said, which is why she decided to do the interdisciplinary program.

Clark said that being an interdisciplinary studies major is different from a regular disciplinary major, but not necessarily more difficult.

"I felt really well taken care of," Clark said. "There's a lot of personal responsibility in putting together one of these degrees — like, the worksheet and filling out the courses you want to take — but ... when you're trying to get hold of a professor, like, those are things that everyone deals with across the University. So, I think there's extra responsibility, but I wouldn't say extra stress."

Clark took the Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies last fall with Fine but said it made sense for a class like this to be team-taught, which is why she suggested she co-teach the class next fall. Fine agreed immediately and said this initiative-taking mindset is characteristic of IDSM students, whom he described as pioneers.

"It is a very creative, challenging area to be in, because you're sort of clearing a path," Fine said. "You are doing something that relatively few people have done, nobody's doing it exactly like you've done and you're having to think kind of in between disciplines."

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Devin Ozkal
Junior

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