

Clint & Jenny Osner (OHS-nur) – Hired Man’s Grocery & Grill Inc.

This is Kansas Profile. I’m Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Homegrown.” It’s nice to enjoy homegrown products fresh from the garden, for example. Today we’ll learn about a store which is providing lots of good products in a rural community. A key to its success is that the business itself is homegrown. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Jenny and Clint Osner are owners of Hired Man’s Grocery & Grill Inc. in Conway Springs near Wichita. Jenny and Clint grew up and went to school at Conway Springs.

Clint became a certified welder. “I’m a teacher,” Jenny said. She got her education degree from Wichita State and earned a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction. She also taught swimming and lifeguarding.

After the old grocery store in Conway Springs closed, Jenny and Clint decided to open a store themselves. “We did it because we believe in the community,” Jenny said.

Building the new store was a family effort – and I mean that literally. “My brother-in-law is a builder, my uncle is a plumber, and my cousin is an electrician,” Jenny said. Family members pitched in to help. The new building opened on July 15, 2008.

What to name the new store? “Clint’s uncles are wheat farmers,” Jenny said. “When Clint was a little boy, he always wanted to go out to the farm.” Clint’s father was delivering mail but told Clint he could go with his uncles. “His uncles told him, ‘You can go to the farm with us, but you’ll have to meet us here at 6:30 a.m.’ – and he would be there. Sometimes he got to the truck ahead of his uncles and fell asleep waiting!” Jenny said.

His uncles started calling him Hired Man. The nickname stuck. When he and Jenny opened the store, they called it Hired Man’s Grocery and Grill Inc.

Today, Hired Man’s Grocery and Grill Inc. emphasizes “high quality foods, friendly service and the best prices we can offer,” Jenny said. The store also caters and offers healthy recipes, seasonal flowers, and unique products such as homemade brats and link sausage.

Family involvement didn’t end with the building’s construction. Jenny’s mother, Nancy Koester, serves as the daytime store manager. Clint’s parents, George and Donna Osner, are busy helping in the meat department. Clint and Jenny also have three children: Karlee, Colby, and Haylee.

“We support our local schools, children’s activities, and community organizations and events,” Jenny said. When the local swimming pool was in need of repair, Jenny led the effort to save it.

“We had a Family Fun pool party to raise funds,” Jenny said. Fun activities included a 5K pool run which attracted more than 125 participants, a biggest splash contest, and a splash the mayor contest. Ultimately they were able to save the pool and install a big water slide.

Hired Man’s Grocery & Grill Inc. was featured at the fifth National Rural Grocery Summit led by the K-State Center for Engagement and Community Development. This store and K-State Research and Extension – Sumner County participated in a recent

federal grant project to educate consumers on the benefits of healthy nutritious eating, including lots of fresh fruits and vegetables in the diet.

Jenny also helped raise funds for the local charity called the Mission Mart. Playing off the rivalry between Conway Springs and Cheney (who each have the Cardinals as their mascot), the group staged a Clash of the Cardinals. They held a Cram the Van contest to raise funds and collect donated food for the food pantry. “In seven days, we raised \$1,032.80 and collected 820 pounds of food,” Jenny said.

Such community-minded efforts have helped earn the store the support of local customers. “We are homegrown,” Jenny said. “I think that has helped us with support from the local people.” Such support matters in a rural community like Conway Springs, population 1,308 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, go to www.hiredmans.com.

Homegrown. It’s not just a description of local products, it’s a description of local people. We commend Jenny and Clint Osner for making a difference with good products and service to the community. We hope their efforts keep growing.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.