



**Buehler's**  
*Fresh Foods*

**NO MORE**

The best of Buehler's is now on full





**AT YOUR SERVICE**

(L-R) Dan Shanahan, president and COO; Becky Foster, VP of construction and maintenance; Jack Kerby, store manager; Bob Buehler, EVP of marketing and fresh goods; and Bob Bly, VP of operations.

**By Jim Dudlicek**

# SECRETS

display at its new flagship store.



# "We always hid our best secrets."



## CREAM OF THE CROP

Buehler's bakery turns out fresh baked goods like bread, cookies and its signature cream sticks every day.

That's Becky Foster divulging how Buehler's Fresh Foods used to build its supermarkets. In this case, Foster — VP of construction and maintenance for the Wooster, Ohio-based 15-store chain — and *Progressive Grocer* are looking around the on-site scratch bakery of the extensively remodeled Milltown store, where treats like pies, cookies and Buehler's signature cream sticks are baked fresh daily.

"One of our best secrets is our scratch bakery," Foster says. "We had to open that up and let people see what we do."

To be sure, the bakery's nerve center is on full display for shoppers to see, as are the deli, prepared food kitchen and butcher shop. The store is open and bright; aisles are wide and counters are lower, making associates more accessible to shoppers.

"We listened to our customers through focus panels and surveys to incorporate their feedback into the design," says Dan Shanahan, Buehler's president and COO. "The result was the evolution of new departments, new

products and new services, all under one roof to make our customers' lives easier."

It's clear that the new Milltown store concept was designed with the customer foremost in mind. Among the features requested by members of the focus panel: a drive-through pharmacy and a tech-savvy community room, both of which were added to the plan.

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## LISTENING AND LEARNING

Kerby explains to *PG* Editor-in-Chief Jim Dudlicek how the new Milltown store was designed based on customer feedback.





FLORAL SHOP

THE UPS STORE & PHOTO CENTER

CARD SHOP

RITZMAN PHARMACY



DAIRY

MEAT

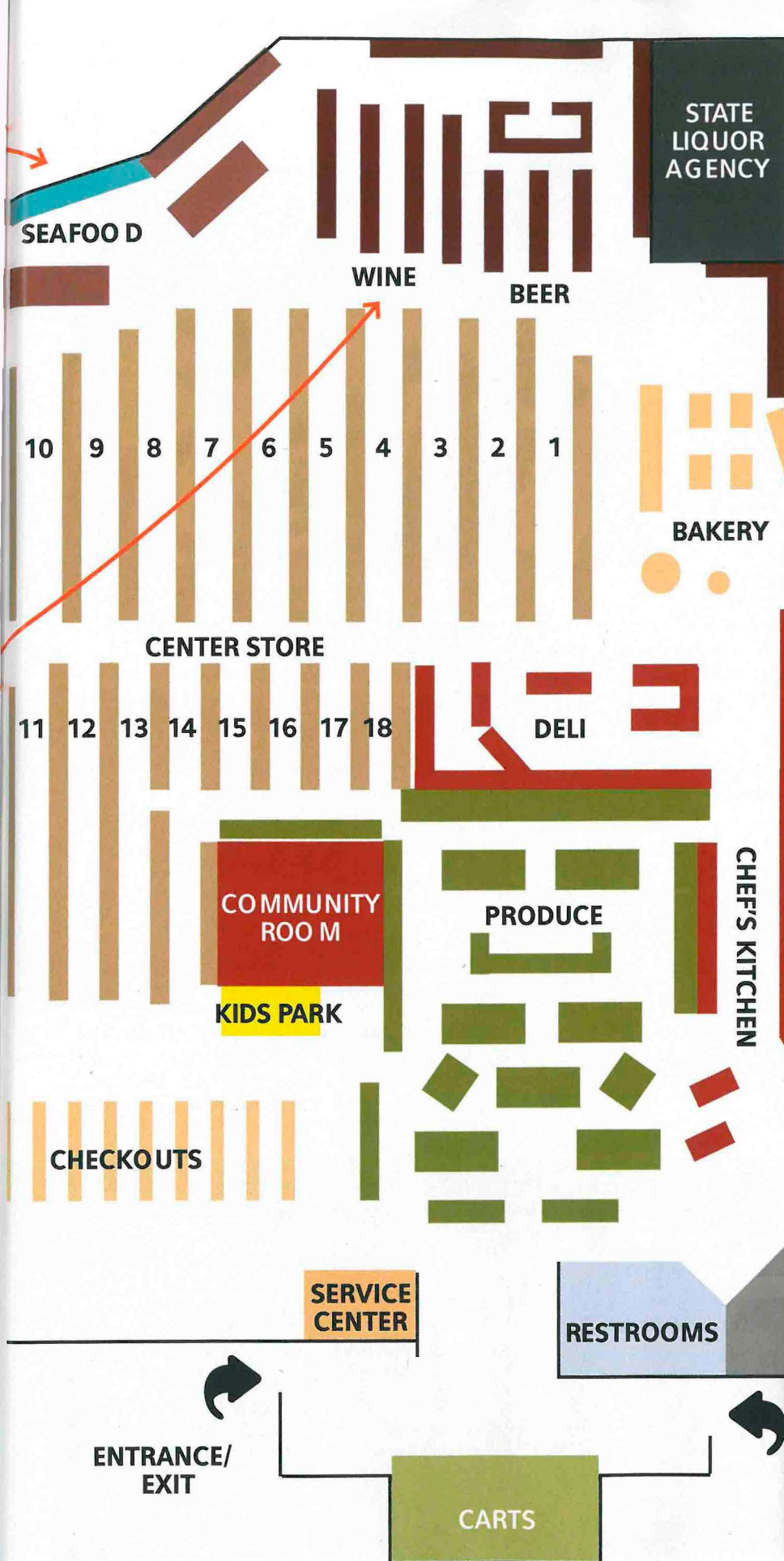
COOKIES  
CRACKERS  
BREAD

FROZEN

HEALTH  
&  
BEAUTY

# Buehler's Fresh Foods





**Buehler's Fresh Foods**  
 3540 Burbank Road  
 Wooster, OH 44691  
**Grand reopening:** Nov. 5, 2014  
**Total area:** 102,075 square feet  
**Selling area:** 45,790 square feet  
**SKUs:** More than 69,000  
 Employees: 275-300  
**Checklanes:** 11 registers, five self-checkouts  
**Hours:** Monday-Saturday 7 a.m.-10 p.m., Sunday 7 a.m.-9 p.m.  
**Designer:** BA Widder Architectural Services, New Philadelphia, Ohio; Davis Wince Ltd. Architecture, Powell, Ohio; Rumora Studios LLC, Baltimore

CHEF'S SCHOOL



THE KITCHEN TABLE







### LIGHT UP THEIR EYES

Brick-oven pizzas are a highlight of the Chef's Kitchen at Buehler's.

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Further, the Buehler's team wanted to achieve a "fresh-first" impression by moving the produce department from the rear of the store to the front. This move paved the way for the new state liquor agency store to be positioned in what used to be the produce area.

Restaurant-quality prepared foods were also a priority. "Results from our surveys expressed the desire for quality fresh foods with no waiting, especially over the lunch hour," Shanahan says. "This inspired our Chef's Kitchen options."

Adds Bob Buehler, EVP for marketing and fresh goods, and representing the third generation of family management, "We are thrilled to reinvest in the community by transforming our flagship store with the latest products, services and features found in the best U.S. supermarkets, and offering these to customers in Wooster."

### Celebrating Food

Signature departments of the new Milltown store include:

- Chef's Kitchen, offering freshly made, hand-stretched brick-oven pizza; custom-made sandwiches made with fresh-baked breads; authentic wok-fired Chinese foods; and sushi rolled by hand daily by in-store sushi chefs.
- The Kitchen Table, a casual dining area featuring a TV, fireplace, lounge area and comfortable seating in a fun, relaxed atmosphere.
- The Beverage Bar, with self-serve Scenic River signature coffees and a Coca-Cola Freestyle machine.



- Buehler's Bakery, where shoppers can observe the made-from-scratch production of artisan breads, gourmet muffins and various pastries.
- The Big Beer Experience, featuring eight tap varieties of craft, specialty and local beers.
- A wine-tasting bar, offering a range of wines in 5-ounce servings for \$5 and up.
- A community room, offering free meeting space to nonprofits, with foodservice and catering options.
- A new floor-to-ceiling floral department showcasing a variety of flowers and service capabilities.
- A state liquor agency — a store within a store — flanked by expanded beer and wine departments.

"Our foodservice concept celebrates an array of fresh chef-prepared foods," Shanahan says. Customers place their orders at the Chef's Kitchen counter, pay at the separate foodservice register, and choose

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## Buehler's History

Ed and Helen Buehler founded Buehler's in 1929 in New Philadelphia, Ohio. With an emphasis on customer service, free delivery, fresh produce, and a clean, friendly store, the original market prospered. Today, Buehler's Fresh Foods is celebrating 86 years in the grocery business with 15 locations and an office/warehouse.

The company is held 100 percent by Buehler family members under the newly created E&H Family Group, which also operates several Ace Hardware stores, and is



managed by a third generation of Buehlers from the Wooster, Ohio, headquarters.

"Ed's business principles of offering quality merchandise at competitive prices, close control of operating expenses, and the recruitment and train-

ing of top-notch people has been passed through the generations of Buehler leadership," says Bob Buehler, third-generation management and EVP of marketing and fresh goods. Meanwhile, fourth-generation family members have recently entered the company structure and are now actively involved in the business.





**ORDER'S UP!**  
Restaurant-quality entrées, ethnic dishes and traditional favorites are available from Milltown's Chef's Kitchen.

► *Continued from page 30*

to take their orders home or eat in the new Kitchen Table casual dining area.

The Chef's Kitchen and Kitchen Table replace a full-service restaurant that formerly operated at this store, which first opened in 1980. "This area is hopping at lunchtime," notes Deb Wilcox, Buehler's director of communications.

Entrées include asiago chicken, ribs and pulled pork, accompanied by side dishes such as loaded twice-baked potatoes and broccoli slaw. Additional options include an expanded salad bar, a hot bar and a homemade-soup bar. Further, on Sundays, a brunch buffet attracts huge crowds that routinely fill all dining-area seats and often spill over into the community room.

"Buehler's commitment to hiring skilled chefs extends to the new Chef's School, a training room to test recipes and menu items that is viewable from the sales floor," Shanahan notes.

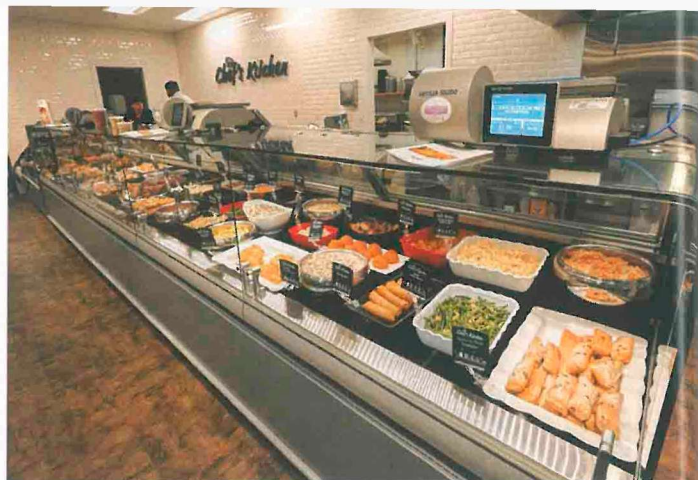
Guided by a team of chefs led by Aaron Gnap, the Chef's School demonstrates that, in the words of VP of Operations Bob Bly, "the experience is not just the eating — it's the learning." The school hosts wine-pairing dinners for hungry Wooster-area residents eager to find out more about food.

"It's fun for our chefs to go one to one with customers," Buehler says. "They talk to you while preparing your meal." During *PG's* visit, I chatted with the culinary team while enjoying a lunch of heirloom tomatoes with fresh mozzarella, a grilled pork chop with mushroom sauce and gouda mashed potatoes, sautéed vegetables, and a salted caramel brownie, all prepared right before my eyes.

Wine-tasting evenings can draw from the ample stocks in Milltown's new wine department, which offers 1,000 varieties of wine and a tasting bar. That's supplemented by a beer department that Buehler's has dubbed the Big Beer Experience, featuring 800 beers, including eight varieties on tap,



**CASUAL COMFORT**  
Television, Wi-Fi and a fireplace are among the amenities in the Milltown store's cozy dining area.



and selections from local brewers such as JAFB-Wooster Brewery, Millersburg Brewery and The Brew Kettle Brewery.

Customers can purchase 32- and 64-ounce growlers to be filled while they wait; samples are available for 25 cents each. The latest tap varieties are revealed on the store's Facebook page.

Together with the state liquor agency branch, Milltown boasts one of the largest liquor selections in Ohio. "The opportunity to sample any of the high-quality draft beers prior to purchasing a growler is a real benefit to our customers," says Store Manager Jack Kerby. "And with the addition of the wine-tasting bar, customers have the chance to sit down and relax with a glass of wine."

In addition to the front-and-center produce area, which features many local items (Buehler's is the largest purchaser of local Amish produce), the Milltown store has an expansive meat and seafood department, including a full-service butcher shop.

"We've always made an effort to buy from local and family-owned companies," Buehler notes. Buehler's offers only Certified Angus Beef (based in Wooster, not far from the Milltown store), some of it procured from Ohio farms and called out as such with on-pack stickers. There's also poultry and other meats from local suppliers.

"A lot of people in the community say they'd never shop anywhere else for produce and meat," Foster declares. "We're known for freshness and variety."

The new dairy department is a walk-through arrangement with wide aisles, decorated in tribute to the agriculturally rich surrounding community with a whimsical Holstein-print floor and a curved ceiling in the shape of a barn roof. Closed cases conserve energy and offer warm comfort to shoppers. The Buehler's team acknowledges mixed reviews on the decor: "People love it, or they don't," Shanahan quips.

Shoppers on their way from the fresh area back to spirits can't help noticing the focal point in the bakery area: a giant pink industrial-size mixer. Dating from the 1930s, this very mixer was used in the store's bakery for many years and received its pastel hue when restored for display. "We had a Facebook contest to name it," Kerby says. "The winner was Humphrey Hobart."



## Engaging the Community

It's connecting with the community in this way that demonstrates another example of Buehler's commitment to the people who've supported the business for more than eight decades.

"We engaged the community during the remodeling process to make them a part of it," Wilcox explains. In fact, many folks truly are a part of the market; customers and employees were given the opportunity to sign an I-beam that supports the front of the store. "It's fun — when they come in and shop, they can find their name," she says. Also, a dozen youngsters participating in the Buehler's KidzPark program (free child care for kids age 3 to 9 while their parents shop) were randomly selected to put their handprints in the stone foundation in the store's lobby.

Consumer panels assembled to garner feedback revealed their affection for Buehler's. "One person said, 'don't change anything,'" Shanahan admits; Foster is quick to add, "But they're all happy now."

What did shoppers want most? "They wanted to see our produce department in the front," Kerby recounts.

"Our goal is to be a resource to the community as *the* place to shop, as well as a place to gather and meet," Shanahan affirms, explaining how the store's community room offers nonprofit groups a private room to hold their meetings rent-free, with catered food options available (the space had been occupied by an earlier cooking school format, which didn't catch on). The company often holds corporate meetings here, and recently the room played host to a book signing by self-help author and Skinnygirl Cocktails founder Bethenny Frankel, an event that drew more than 200 people. Buehler's also hosts wellness presentations here through its partnership with Cleveland Clinic.

Other key features: "We planned two separate entrance/exit areas," Foster notes. "The main entrance at the front of the store is flooded with natural light, and allows for easy access from either side of the parking lot."

This broad expanse, where visitors grab their shopping carts, has become a gathering place of sorts, where folks congregate to talk and check out the digital events board, which replaced a clutter of traditional paper notices. "It's turned into a social kind of place," Buehler says. "That was a surprise to me."

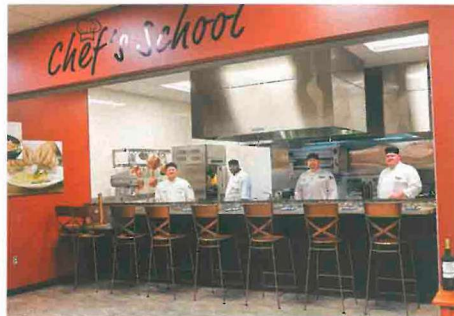
Meanwhile, the second entrance is at the side of the building for express runs to floral, cards, pharmacy, health and beauty care, and The UPS Store, a Buehler's-owned franchise.

Ritzman Pharmacy, a leased partner, has a

new home at the front of the store for easy access, and now offers customers a drive-through feature in Buehler's pickup lane. Health-and-wellness products have been relocated near the pharmacy to complete the department.

To further assist customers with wellness, Buehler's partners with Cleveland Clinic to use the latter's Go! Foods logo on products with no trans fats, minimal added sugars, whole grains and limited sodium. The clinic also holds wellness talks in the store's community room.

"When checking out, Buehler's customers enjoy custom loading of their groceries under-cover via a one-of-a-kind conveyer system," Foster says, explaining the system launched by Buehler's some three de-



### SCHOOL'S IN SESSION

Head Chef Aaron Gnap leads the store's culinary team that educates as well as nourishes.

acades ago. Shopping carts aren't allowed in the parking lot at Buehler's; instead, checkers load groceries into large totes, which are whisked via conveyor belt to a sheltered vehicle loading area. As a result, there are no carts to ding customers' cars, and no dirty cart wheels tracking rain and snow through the store. (It's the grocery-loading system, along with the fresh prepared food areas, that accounts for most of the store's above-average back-of-house square footage.)

"Those of us who grew up in this area wouldn't know what it's like to push your groceries out to the car," Foster remarks. For his part, Buehler recounted meeting a mother of twins who drives a half-hour just to shop at Buehler's because of its online ordering and car-loading service.

With Buehler's online shopping service, Click, Load & Go, customers select their groceries online at least three hours in advance; then store associates pick the orders, bundle them and run them out to customers' cars during the chosen pickup window.





### Always Progressive

The community has embraced its new store since the grand reopening last November. “The public response has been very positive for all our new concepts,” Kerby says. “All the different foodservice is really starting to catch on.”

**ON THE SHELF**  
Wide aisles and ample lighting make for an enjoyable shopping experience.

The single greatest challenge has been getting customers acclimated to where products and departments are located, Kerby says. “We handed out store maps and have printed aisle directories on our shopping-cart handles to help assist customers with locating items,” he explains. “We also have employees looking for ‘lost’ customers, available to take shoppers directly to items.”

One of the biggest challenges during the project was the length of time the remodel took. “We specifically designed the construction timeline to minimize customer inconvenience by working only at night when the store was closed,” Buehler explains. “This commitment served for a construction-free shopping environment, yet extended the remodel to 14 months.”

Bogner Construction, based in Wooster, spearheaded the project. “We made a conscientious effort to support the local community by involving over 60 local contractors and businesses in the remodeling,” Buehler declares. “The new Milltown store design and department concepts are the foundation for Buehler’s store remodels moving forward. We have the basic toolbox developed of brand colors, design elements and department composition. We will carefully evaluate the Milltown design — listening to customer feedback — to make appropriate modifications to the basic design for future store remodels.”

Buehler’s is big on giving back to the community philanthropically as well; the company has a long history of supporting and partnering with nonprofits. Wilcox says 2015 “marks a new philanthropic focus

to identify a core cause for corporate giving to make an even greater impact.”

The company is teaming with the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, which directly supports local member agencies such as food banks, shelters and pantries. “We are excited at the many opportunities to make a difference through not only monetary donations, but [also] through volunteer opportunities,” Wilcox says.

Helping people is important to the company, as it’s people who make the difference in the high level of service it offers. “We’re about putting people first,” Buehler says. “That’s where we seem to excel over our competitors.” To that end, he participates in a share group comprising 20 noncompeting independent retailers who share ideas for best practices and addressing common challenges.

Also, Buehler’s is working on boosting its digital initiatives; the grocer is active on Facebook and Twitter, now accepts Apple Pay, and is developing an online foodservice-ordering system to augment Click, Load & Go. “We try to be as aggressive as we can for a company our size,” Shanahan says.

Further, Buehler’s is working on a video that showcases its back-of-house operations, which the store’s new design makes more visible to shoppers. “We have a story to tell there,” Buehler says, referring particularly to the scratch bakery. “It’s finding ways to let people know we’re different — we know it, but we don’t always do a good job telling it.”

At Buehler’s, “putting people first” is not just a slogan — “this is our everyday commitment to value and respect our employees, our customers and our vendors,” Shanahan asserts. “We buy from local farmers, growers and suppliers when possible, supporting our surrounding communities. We listen to our customers’ concerns and ideas, and work to provide the products and services they deserve. We are actively involved in our communities, offering turnkey fundraising opportunities for schools, charities and nonprofits. We provide top-notch training programs to our employees to give them the knowledge, food safety courses and customer service training they need to exceed customers’ expectations. We also promote from within, realizing that our employees are our valuable assets. We strive to make Buehler’s a great place to work, an enjoyable place to shop, a trusted retailer and a positive influence in the communities we serve.”

What’s more, as so many features of the Milltown store demonstrate, Buehler’s has always been an innovator. “Buehler’s is a small chain,” Shanahan says, “but we’re as progressive as anybody out there.” **PG**

*“Buehler’s is a small chain, but we’re as progressive as anybody out there.”*

—Dan Shanahan,  
president/COO

Learn more about Buehler’s Milltown store at  
[Progressivegrocer.com/BuehlersSOM](http://Progressivegrocer.com/BuehlersSOM).