

Aptos' Piggie Market

The TLC makes the difference

By CANDACE ATKINS

THE LAMENTABLE evolution of mom and pop grocery stores into today's convenience market has yet to arrive in Aptos. And as long as there is the Piggie Market, local shoppers will have little use for the antiseptic efficiency of mini-supers.

Piggie Market, run by Norman and Mary Ann Kaplan for 11 years, is efficient enough — customers can make their purchases and be on their way in minutes. But there is more to Piggie than a quick stop for bread and milk.

"It's the TLC that makes us different," said Mary Ann Kaplan. "It's nothing except TLC."

When the Kaplans bought the operation, it was Rich's Farm-

became the Piggie Market."

The fortunes of the new market also were enhanced a few weeks after the new owners took over when the major supermarkets were hit by a strike. The labor dispute brought new customers to Piggie. They noticed the expanded inventory and other changes, Mary Ann said, and many have been steady customers since.

Many customers come to Piggie for what Mary Ann calls "fill-ins" — salad ingredients, a loaf of bread or even raviolis — things people might need between trips to the supermarket. Piggie Market was always intended to be the little store people can count on at 5:30 in the afternoon when time is short and there is nothing at home to fix for dinner.



ers Market, located on the frontage road of Highway 1 near Redwood Village. A fiberglass pig was affixed to the roof, and customers referred to the store as "the pig market."

"It was built-in PR," said Mary Ann Kaplan. "Norman worked with a local artist, Bob Eddy, on a pig logo, and we

"We fill the need for the customer like me who can be disorganized," Mary Ann said.

The Kaplans moved to Aptos from Los Angeles after a Labor Day weekend visit in 1973. They found the area so attractive that they decided on the spot to move north. Within a week they bought the business and a month

later, they were behind the counter, leaving a lucrative vending machine business they operated in Southern California.

"Who, me? Do I like to take risks?" asked Mary Ann. "Sure."

Norman was raised in the grocery business, his father operated a small chain of markets. Mary Ann was a former PBX operator and admits to the gift of gab. They made a perfect combination as proprietors of Piggie Market.

"My background helped when we started the business," she said. "I did what I do best — work with people. This was a friendly community from the start, people were easy to get to know."

For both, the first years of Piggie Market meant 14-hour days, seven days a week. Norman did the ordering and deliveries while Mary Ann helped customers.

As the number of customers grew, so did Piggie offerings. Today, there is a well-stocked deli, a large assortment of produce, fresh bakery items and a selection of coffee beans, in addition to basic stock. But the Kaplans insist Piggie Market caters to nobody in particular, and is a "middle of the road kind of store."

"We don't sell gourmet stuff at all," Norman said. "We offer a good thick sandwich (in the deli), but nothing fancy, just basic good food. We're the 'now store, if you want something now, we have it now.'"

Piggie Market's staff rings up sales from customers of all ages. The average purchase totals about \$4, but there are lots of students who spend under a dollar for after school treats.

Young people are treated with the same respect as other cus-

tomers, she added. While some stores will permit only a few children to shop at a time, Piggie Market's staff sees little need for such regulations. They have few problems with vandalism or theft, she said.

After several years on the frontage road, the Kaplans decided to move to Redwood Village for more selling space and better parking. They supervised the design of the present store, which features a cupola and geometric shape.

"We didn't want just any building," said Norman. "It had to fit into the community, it couldn't be commercial."

Changes have continued, even in the new location. The deli has been enlarged three times in response to customer demands.

The Kaplans serve lunch to construction workers, highway workers, truckers and office staff. They offer three kinds of

soup, four or five entrees, plus sandwiches, burritos, bagel dogs, pioski, chili, sausages, potato, macaroni, bean and pasta salads, stuffed grape leaves, chicken, ribs and even herring in sour cream. Desserts include mocha mousse cheese-cake, velvet truffle cake and "the best" apple pie.

"People are glad we're here," said Mary Ann. "We're open holidays — we try to stay open no matter what."

The Kaplans managed to keep Piggie Market open after the floods of 1981-82, and have since bought a generator to be sure they can serve customers even during a power outage.

"The storms were hard," said Mary Ann. "We'd have people we knew stand in line and tell you half their house was gone. It was a very, very devastating, emotionally draining time."

The Kaplans have seen chil-

dren grow up and begin families of their own. One of the telling signs is when a young person starts to buy alcohol.

"They put a six-pack of beer on the counter and I tell them, 'C'mon, who are you trying to kid?' Then I realize they're grown up. As far as I'm concerned, they're still in junior high," Mary Ann said.

With five grandsons, the Kaplans try to work fewer hours than before and even take a weekend off now and then. Mary Ann is president of the city-county library board and is active in other community affairs. While the business can be pressure-filled, the Kaplans have no thoughts of changing their careers.

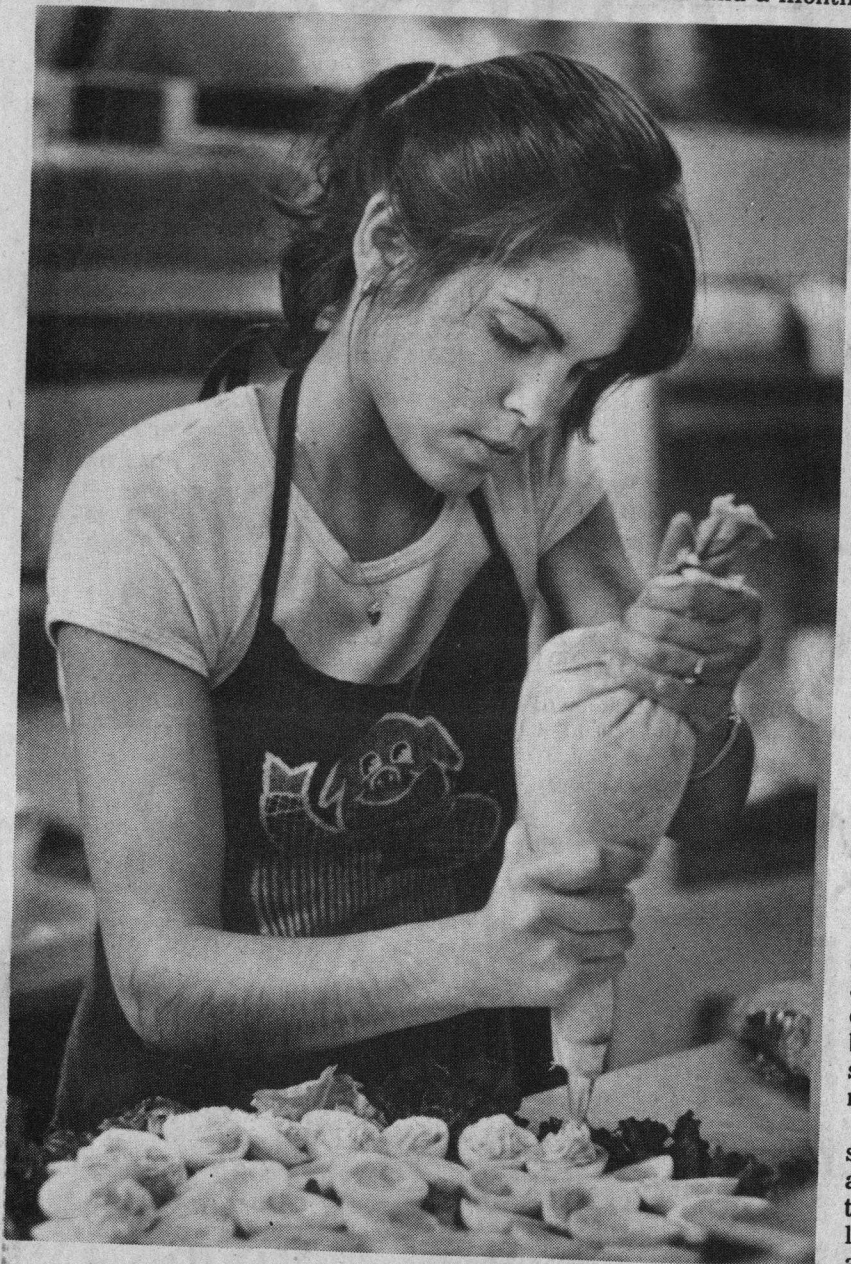
"It's also fun," Mary Ann said. "You are dealing with people all day long — 700 to 800 people a day. The rewards are great."

Checkers Annette Forlow, far left, and Katie Lewis help customers and Kirk Halstead stocks shelves.

Photos by Kurt Ellison



Norman and Mary Ann Kaplan have operated Piggie Market for 11 years.



Angela Reynolds stuffs eggs for Piggie Market's deli.