



Butcher Jeff Bassman makes his way between carcasses in the cooler at Freedom Meat Lockers.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

# Timeless meat shop

Freedom Meat Lockers survives by offering quality to loyal customers



**ABOVE:** Freedom Meat Lockers' Cliff Mosley creates old-fashioned hot dogs the old-fashioned way — by hand.

**RIGHT:** Rubber-stamp labels tell the story of the wide selection at Freedom Meat Lockers.

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**FREEDOM**

**I**n a small enclave that is Hi-Grade Lane, a 56-year-old wood-paneled building emits the smell of hickory.

The building is old but not tired, and the rustic doors open to reveal a timeless meat shop, where, at any given moment, 49 varieties of sausages are being cooked and smoked to perfection.

Hi-Grade Lane is no metaphor, but a reality for Freedom Meat Lockers, the largest custom butcher shop in the state. And although Freedom Meat Lockers is part of a dying establishment of community meat markets, through its quality and loyal customer base it has survived by providing some of the best meat products in Santa Cruz County.

Freedom Meat Lockers recently received 10 awards from the California Association of Meat Processors for its meat products and is now having trouble finding wall space for the award plaques, since previous awards already take up much space.

"It was the first time our beef jerky was entered in this category, and for me to get first place the first time entering was incredible. It tells me we were doing a lot of stuff right," said Cliff Mosley, a talkative man who is at a loss for words to describe his title.

"I do everything here," he said.

Mosley has the stature of a butcher and the affable personality of a local shop owner, welcoming customers by name. He is not the owner — the owner was on vacation, leaving the shop with Mosley — but he is the foundation of Freedom Meat Lockers, running the show for 12 years and bringing home awards for nearly each of them.

Competing with 150 other meat markets in the state, Mosley won first place for his breakfast sausage, whole smoked turkey, smoked turkey breast, boneless ham, beef jerky, and marinated skirt steak for fajitas. He also

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Butchers Moises Rivera and Jeff Bassman ply their trade on trays and mounds of tri tip at Freedom Meat Lockers.

## Meat

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won second prize for his bacon and smoked hot Italian sausage, and third prize for his roast beef and St. Louis style ribs.

### Just like the old days

Going to Freedom Meat Lockers is like going back to the time before corporate grocery stores, where customers can bring their quartered cow, or hunted deer, to be made into sausages, jerky, or cut into steaks. In the summer, people haul hunting trophies such as deer, boars and wild rams from as far off as Montana for processing and smoking.

"A lot of our customers go out of state and bring their product back here in the summer," Mosley said. "But wild hogs come year-round and that keeps us busy."

Many from old world traditions bring their family recipes to Freedom, like the Portuguese population in Watsonville, or the Croats who live in Santa Clara, or the elder Italian man, all of whom have requests from Mosley, who is more than willing to comply. And when the holidays come around, Mosley is kept busy making hundreds of pounds of sausages and other meat products.

"We have something for everyone here," Mosley said during an oratory on his sausages. "My good old boy friends like the Louisiana hot links, and there's the mild smoked bratwurst for the Germans; for the Louisiana Creoles we have the hot mild Cajun sausage."

### Training ground

The inside of Freedom Meat Lockers is a mix of the old and new, with old meat rails still on the walls and the namesake 40-year-old meat lockers still in use. But



Tubs of sausages sit ready for packing at Freedom Meat Lockers.

### Freedom Meat Lockers

**WHAT:** Retail meat and smoke shop.

**WHERE:** 160 Hi-Grade Lane, Freedom.

**PRODUCTS:** Fresh and marinated steaks, fresh and smoked sausages, ham, bacon, beef jerky, deli meats, sandwiches, etc.

**OWNER:** Howard Walker.

**EMPLOYEES:** 10.

**INFORMATION:** 724-4355.

**INTERESTING FACTS:** Recently won first place for breakfast sausage, whole smoked turkey, smoked turkey breast, boneless ham, beef jerky and marinated skirt steak for fajitas; won second place for bacon and smoked hot Italian sausage, and third place for roast beef and St. Louis style ribs; more awards than any other California meat market this year and last.

spotless stainless steel counters and smells of soap and hickory smoke convey a prevailing sense of cleanliness.

"One of our major points is that we take pride in that we have a very clean shop," Mosley said while standing on a floor covered in soapy water.

Freedom Meat Lockers is so clean that the California Department of Food and Agriculture uses the shop for training of other state meat inspectors, said Earl Willis, a meat inspector for the state who oversees the Freedom store.

"They pay close attention to their sanitation program, they don't skimp on it; it's a well run operation from top to bottom," Willis said.

Mosley is most proud of his

sausages, which can contain any number of spices, vegetables or even fruit. One is the chicken picante sausage — with jalapeno, red and green peppers, lemon peel, cardamom, cilantro, oregano, garlic, coriander and lemon juice. Out of the 49 different sausages, Mosley makes portabella mushroom sausages, sun-dried tomato basil sausages, and sausages with currants, walnuts and cherries.

For old-timers like Fred Linnemen, a loyal customer since 1977, Freedom Meat Lockers is the only place to buy meat.

"He's got about the best meat as far as I'm concerned," Linnemen said.

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