

Oldmeldrum's young enterprise doing 'affa' fine



Gary Chalmers wondered what he had done wrong when his boss asked to see him in his office on a Wednesday morning. Arriving in a state of trepidation, the young man was in for a pleasant surprise.

His boss asked him how he liked it here and having got a positive reply, the follow up question was 'how do you feel about owning the place?' Instead of being pulled up for something the 28 year old suddenly realised that he was being offered first chance to buy the business!

It was not something that he had seen coming but it was a fantastic opportunity. Gary and his wife felt that they were possibly too young for such a move but their youth possibly attracted Gordon Presly to the idea of his successors. Gary was young and enthusiastic and good with customers. He was hard working and was strong enough to carry on the business.

In the end both old and new bosses needed a bit of time to complete the transition but that was duly completed almost three years later in July 2016.

Gary grew up in Aberchirder. That is a village of almost 1200 inhabitants in the north west corner of Aberdeenshire and even Wikipedia doesn't point out that the C is silent. Just to make comprehension even trickier locals refers to the place as Foggieloa!

Foggieloa kids attend Banff Academy and while a pupil there a 14 year old Gary started working as a Saturday boy in Donald McKay Butchers in his village. Gary progressed working his way through vocational qualifications with Scottish Meat Training before moving on to work for 18 months at Woodhead's plant in Turriff.

Gary missed the buzz of shop work and in 2010 put his feelers out to see if there was anyone willing to take him on. Gordon Presly in Oldmeldrum was looking for someone but misplaced Gary's number. Fortunately he had registered that the butcher's wife was a receptionist at nearby Meldrum House.

Recruited through Gordon visiting the hotel to ask to speak to the receptionist, things moved fast and in less than 10 days Gary had started at Presly's.





It was a big decision for Jan to leave the hospitality sector. She had always wanted a place of her own and it was a significant change of direction when she gave up her vocation to support Gary in the butchers business.

Jan had to go and learn bookkeeping and payroll. She runs the office upstairs and is responsible for the output on Facebook. Jan said:- "This was never in the game plan but it works well!"

Even with seven full time employees and three part timers, Gary is still very hands on.



"I think you need to be here everyday in amongst it, making sure you know what is happening. If you want to grow the business you need to get inside it. I am in at quarter to six in the morning setting up the counter. I also think it is very important to be in the shop everyday."

Gary and Jan have changed very little but there have been a few new products introduced.

"It wasn't broken, everything worked and was very successful. There was a good base to develop other products.



Gary is certainly the face of the business that is why he does the deliveries to the hotels and restaurants. If he doesn't do them Jan does them. He continued:-

"I like to say hello to everybody who comes in and thank them for doing that.

"I am lucky with the staff that I have here, they are all really good hard working reliable people. I feel I can leave them to keep things going."



That trust enabled the two new owners to manage a week; earned one week's break in Corfu. The magnitude of the decision to fly off and for a week in the sun, leaving their reputation in others hands is underlined when Gary added:-

"This is my life now, this is my 'train set', this is my future."

The train did not come off the track and he added "it is rewarding, it is a good feeling and yet I never actually thought that I would own a shop."



Presly & Co is a long established butcher's business with a pedigree stretching back over 100 years. The business moved to Methlick in the 1930s with Jimmy Presly, and the traditional meat maturing process from those days was continued by Gordon Presly in the centre of Oldmeldrum.

After Gary and Jan Chalmers took over at the helm in July 2016 but they continue the regime sourcing from five local farms. Every week three beasts - Aberdeen Angus crossed Limousin - are sourced from surrounding farms and the food miles are minimised by using the Scotbeef abattoir in Inverurie. Supporting local farms simplifies traceability and the farmers in turn commend their local butcher, especially when it is at a time when it is their beef in the counter.

Beef farms:-

George Ritch, East Fingask, Oldmeldrum
 Lyon Craigie, Mains of Whitefield, Daviot
 Callum Chalmers, Mains of Seggat, Auchterless
 Gavin Ross, Wardhead, Strichen
 Bill Blackhall, Bogfon, Maryculter

Pork and lamb are supplied by Scotbeef and a minimum of three pigs every week for bacon production come from Munro's in Dingwall.

Chicken is supplied by Lomand Foods, Bronze turkeys from nearby Barra Turkeys and white turkeys from Alan Blackhall at Banchory.

The shop is proud of their extensive range of traditional homemade products are all of the highest quality made in the Market Square premises. Sausages, pies, home cured bacon, haggis, puddings and cooked products are all first class.





A house speciality is a pork sausage with sweet peppers and mustard seeds whose named was chosen by customers sampling a new recipe sausage placed on the counter to gauge their opinion. The replies were constantly the same - "oh these are affa fine". So the name stuck.

The range of sausage extends to concoctions like Pork, Apple & Stilton, Pork & Black Pudding, Stroganoff, Louisiana and Smokey Joes. Burgers are just as adventurous with Pork, Honey & Mustard real winners. Pies include Steak, Mince pies, Steak & Cheese and Lasagne Pies.

Presly's popular own cured bacon includes variations such as Sweet Dry Cured, Smoked Maple cured bacon.

There are plenty of good reasons for this business to succeed. Gary claims it's about building up from a sound foundation. The mix is 50% retail and 50% made up of wholesale to convenience shops and caterers including Meldrum House Hotel, Eat on the Green and the Strathburn in Inverurie as well as four golf clubs.

"We have a lot of good clients and it is all about keeping them. We have to make sure that everybody is happy" said Gary.

Jan started the business Facebook page in 2014 and she claims phenomenal success promoting the likes of Haggis Nests:-

"We had more than 700 ordered in January. We couldn't keep up making them. People were liking and sharing and it attracted younger customers. Oven ready trays with meat in a sauce go well."

Gary chipped in "we find ladies Facebooking their husbands pictures of Presly's meat dishes asking 'do you fancy this for your tea tonight?'. We find that the customers will come and buy that on their way home. It is a great way to communicate with your customers without them actually coming through your door."

Under new controllers the 'train set' is powering on, the points are well oiled and Presly's butchers is well placed to satisfy a local market of discerning buyers. There is an element of being in the right waiting room at the station but the Foggieolan loon has done 'affa fine' since his receptionist made that appointment for him seven years ago. Somehow you have to believe that Gary and Jan will always have plenty passengers in their carriages.

