

Business Connection



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Ice cream with a side of milk

Takens Family continues the legacy of Pleasanton's Meadowlark Dairy

The Meadowlark Dairy was founded more than a century ago, on 153 acres on Foothill Road in Pleasanton by Walter Briggs Sr. It was the first certified dairy in California.

Jannes and Janna Takens immigrated to the United States from Holland after World War II and moved to Berkeley. Eventually, the Takens settled in Pleasanton and began working on the farm where Alviso Adobe Community Park is today.

In 1958, the Takens signed a 10-year lease for the Dairy and eventually bought it. In 1968, the 680 freeway was going to be built, so the Takens moved the cows from Pleasanton to Tracy and built a milk processing plant at 57 W. Neal Street, where the Dairy remains today.

The Dairy has been a drive-through since it opened in July 1969, replacing the former drive-through Dairy on Foothill Road. Jannes and Janna's son Bruce and his wife Patti took over the business in the 1980s, and they are the ones responsible for starting the soft serve ice cream cones that are still wildly popular to this day.

After running the Dairy for more than 30 years, Bruce and Patti turned things over to their son Jesse and his wife Kelsey in 2017. The third-generation, husband and wife team from the Takens Family was

no stranger to the business. "I was 14 and Kelsey was probably 16 when we started working there," said Jesse.

"I think I knew pretty early on, maybe age 9 or 10, that that's what I wanted to do," said Jesse. "I'm not a great student, and for whatever reason this piqued my interest. I like to talk to people, and if you ask anyone that works here, they'll tell you I'm always the one that's holding up the line."

Jesse can be found at the Dairy every day during the week and every other weekend, while Kelsey does more of the behind-the-scenes work, making sure bills are getting paid and tracking payroll. The couple also stays plenty busy with their three kids, ages 10, 5 and 3.

The Dairy currently has 115 part-time employees, a large number of which are local high school students. The most tenured staff can be found working midweek during the day. "I can't even call them old," Jesse says of his few college-aged workers.

"For most of these kids, this is their first job," said Jesse. "I'll be the first to admit, at 15, I didn't know a whole lot. But we have a system that helps guide them. They're all eager to work and they're happy to be here."

Open daily Monday through

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Jesse and Kelsey Takens (on the left) with their children Grace, Caleb and Mason along with Bruce and Patti Takens (middle) and Katie and Mike Talton with their daughter Jaeda.



The soft-serve ice cream cones at the Dairy are a popular treat with vanilla, chocolate, orange and strawberry available year round. Additional flavors are also introduced on a weekly basis.

Meadowlark Dairy

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Thursday 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Friday through Sunday 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., the number of young adults working at the Dairy ranges from just a handful midday during the week to as many as 24 at a time on the weekends. Not to be forgotten is the afternoon (after school) rush, which is a busy shift for 16-17 staff at a time.

"I've always enjoyed it," said Jesse of working with local high school students. "The kids make it fun; they all have their own personality and the atmosphere they bring keeps me going."

As with so many things in today's world, the pandemic really changed the day-to-day operations of the Dairy. In 2020 and 2021, nearly 90% of their business became groceries as opposed to ice cream.



Jannes Takens at the Dairy in 1951 when it was located on Old Foothill Road, now Alviso Adobe.

"Today, it's probably back to about 60% ice cream. And really any time after noon, it is mostly ice cream," said Jesse.

At the end of 2022, the Dairy started offering Meadowlark branded clothing (hats, sweatshirts, t-shirts) and accessories for purchase. "We

had a kid that was interested in design, and he was really good at drawing, so I asked him to draw some stuff for us. He still works here a couple of days a week."

From being the first certified dairy in California to opening up the current downtown drive-thru



Bruce and Jannes Takens at the Neal Street dairy location in the 1980s just before the dairy stopped processing milk.

location, delivering milk to schools across the bay area, selling soft serve ice cream, and making merchandise, the Takens family has had quite the journey. The one constant that's stood the test of time is the Takens family bringing joy to countless families in the area

through the old-town vibe that is the Meadowlark Dairy.

"We don't change very much, but when we do it's noticeable," said Jesse. "As all the grocery needs change, we'll have some different stuff. But the ice cream and milk products will always be here."