

Pasadena Has Become A Haven For Family Operated Businesses

By Hayley M. Gable

At a time when some small businesses are being sold to larger corporations, many in the Pasadena area are holding strong thanks to the longtime support of family. Places like Lauer's Supermarket, McCully-Polyniak Funeral Home and Kurtz's Beach have become landmarks in Anne Arundel County because of their historic family backgrounds.

Pasadena, it seems, has become a haven for small, family-owned businesses that have been passed down from generation to generation. While many of these businesses have changed physically – whether relocating or simply renovating – the heart and soul of the work that's put in comes from family members.

The Fifer boys own **Fifer's Seafood**. They all graduated from either Chesapeake High School or Spalding and are perfectly aware of what it means to run a family business. Their grandfather, Art Fifer, established Sterling Seafood in Baltimore in 1949 and in 1972 Sterling Seafood evolved into what is now Anne Arundel Seafood. The business was subsequently taken over by Dick, Butch and Pixie Fifer, along with Butch Hammond.

Seeing the success of their father and uncles' seafood business, the Fifer boys – Tracy, Chris, Billy and Richard – decided to follow in the family footsteps, and Fifer's Seafood was opened in May 2001 by the four brothers and four additional employees. What began as a simple carry-out seafood market is now a thriving restaurant, bar and popular Pasadena hangout.

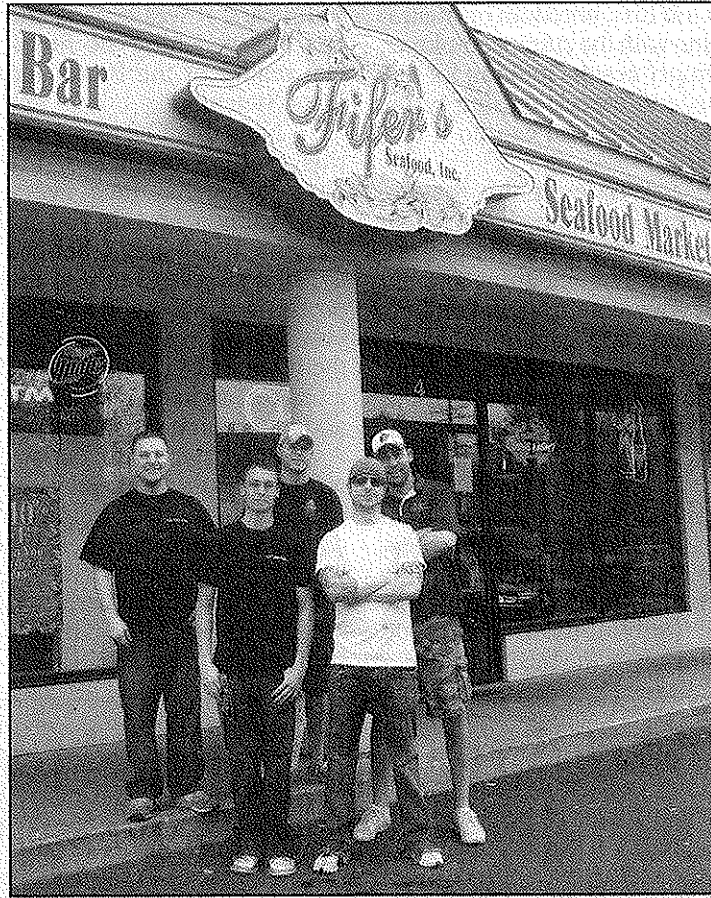


Photo by Hayley M. Gable
Co-owner Billy Fifer, shown with part of the staff at Fifer's Seafood, and his three brothers represent the third generation of Fifers working in the seafood business.

Entering their eighth summer in business, Billy Fifer admits it hasn't always been easy working with his brothers.

"Since there's four of us, we're usually never here at the same time; we try to give each other different shifts. It works out better that way," he said, with a laugh. "I often tell people that we're related – not affiliated," he continued.

McCully-Polyniak Funeral Home has been a Pasadena staple ever since James and Doris McCully opened their doors on Mountain Road in 1971.

"In order to keep the business within the family, Mr.

and Mrs. McCully ended up giving full ownership to their niece Valerie Polyniak, in 1994," explained Francis S. Karczmarek, general manager of the funeral home. Despite the passing of Mr. McCully 12 years ago, Dorris McCully has remained active within the business, attending many funerals and interacting with customers.

"She's been in the business for so long and knows it so well," added Karczmarek.

Another family owned and operated business is also one of Pasadena's most popular grocery stores. Lauer's Supermarket was founded in 1974 by Ed and Helen Lauer.

At the time, the grocery store was located at the corner of Mountain and Tick Neck Roads, but as the store grew Mr. Lauer felt the need for a bigger, more accommodating location. In 1988, with the help of his wife and two daughters, Bernie and Babbie, Ed Lauer moved his store to Edwin Raynor Boulevard, where it remains today.

Both of the Lauer daughters worked at the store throughout high school and college, but they did not fully take over as President and Vice President until the late nineties, when they spearheaded the addition of a large café and deli at the Chesterfield location in 1999. They say after a decade, they've learned a lot about working together as business partners and family.

"Working together, business always comes first," said Bernie, vice president of the store.

She also explained that while she and her sister operate the stores together, they are usually not at the same store. "I stay at the Chesterfield location one day, and she'll stay at Riviera Beach, or vice versa," she said. "One of us is always present."

Although Mr. Lauer is now 83 years old and has been retired for the past 12 years, his desk still sits in the back of the Chesterfield store just in case he decides to stop by. As far as giving advice to anyone interested in becoming involved with a family business, Bernie noted that there are pros and cons.

"The pros are there is flexibility, the cons are it is a huge responsibility," she explained. "But you learn to work together... I would definitely recommend it."