

## A day in the life of a



► “The retail business, it’s actually pretty easy to figure out, really,” Pat DiBiasio says. “You find out what the customer wants, and you give it to them. That’s it.”

# Retail Meat Cutter

For Pat DiBiasio, it’s all about pleasing the customer.

Story & photos by **Bryan Schaaf**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

It’s not long after 3 a.m. when Pat DiBiasio’s alarm clock lets out its morning tirade to an unwelcoming audience of two. After this many years, his wife has grown so accustomed to the ritual siren that she barely stirs. She knows it’s her husband for whom the bell tolls.

The countryside surrounding his rural Medina County home is draped in blackness

not meant for any reasonable human’s eyes. As he climbs into his car and drives off for the day with a smile on his face, it becomes quite clear — this isn’t a time of day meant for regular people. It is the hour of the meat cutter.

### The meat man cometh

For as long as he can remember, big

hunks of meat, sharp knives and bitter working conditions were part of the norm for DiBiasio. His father was an old-school meat man with Tops Friendly Markets in Northeast Ohio, and Pat was always willing to jump in and get his hands dirty.

During his formative years, he tried some different employment and even attended

CONTINUED ON PAGE 280

### A day in the life ...

It takes a heap of work, coordination and planning to get a tasty steak from pasture to plate. In honor of National Beef Month in May, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) decided to check in with the people who devote their life’s work to providing, cooking and delivering the Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) brand to tables around the world.

CAB staff shadowed professionals in various segments of the beef industry, walking in their shoes for a day. They shared their experiences with readers throughout the month on [www.gorare.com](http://www.gorare.com)

and [www.blackinkwithcab.com](http://www.blackinkwithcab.com), CAB’s foodie consumer blog and beef production blog, respectively.

With so many segments in the industry, the blog series helps connect the dots from farm to fork. We share some of those insights in this series prepared for the *Angus Journal*. We began the series last month with a feature on Chef Zac Alft. This month we follow retail meat cutter Pat DiBiasio.

**A day in the life of a  
Retail Meat Cutter** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 279

the University of Akron for a spell, but DiBiasio's fate had already been etched into the butcher's block.

"I can remember the first piece of meat I cut," DiBiasio says. "It was an oxtail, and with oxtails, you have to cut them between the bones just right for them to come apart. I got it on my first try, and the meat manager in the store at the time said, 'The kid's a natural. I should've run right then and there.'"

Like his father, DiBiasio joined the Tops meat team and was slowly indoctrinated into the meat-cutting brethren. When Tops closed down in the mid-2000s, he worked as a buyer before being introduced to one of the most unique grocery experiences in Ohio.

### **Buehler's Fresh Foods**

It was 1929. Depression was just beginning to canvas the country. Yet, Northeast Ohio's gritty facade has always allowed it to remain somewhat insulated from national tragedy. While the rest of the country was reeling, a couple named Ed and Helen Buehler were just beginning to carve their path.

They opened a small grocery store in New Philadelphia. Three years later, they brought their business to Wooster.

Operating under the principle of providing excellent customer service, free delivery, garden-fresh produce and a clean, well-kept store, the business thrived.

By 1944, a second, larger operation in nearby Dover was opened. More stores followed, and suddenly Ed and Helen's fledgling storefront was a full-blown retail operation.

Under the steady hand of the Buehler sons, Don and Gene; grandsons Bob, Roger, Greg, Dan and Scott; and now even a few members of the fourth generation of Buehlers, the

business has grown to 13 stores and is often recognized as the poster child for how modern independent grocers should operate.

### **Time to make the doughnuts**

It's just after 4 a.m. when DiBiasio strolls in the back door of his building. It's one of the oldest stores in the family, and doesn't have many of the bells and whistles found within its younger siblings.

That's the way he likes it. There's an undeniable pride that's easy to glean from DiBiasio and his coworkers about this store. It's old. It's not as shiny as it once was, but it's theirs.

Across the store, shelves are being stocked, pastries are being baked and, in his meat department, DiBiasio and his trusted sidekick, Mary Jo Mattie, are assessing their coolers, identifying which items need to be shelved before customers arrive.

By 7 a.m., DiBiasio's right-hand man shows up. Larry Maitland started with Buehler's in 1975 and is now semi-retired, working as a part-time meat cutter.

While DiBiasio and Mattie are pulling everything from Superior Bacon to Bob Evans sausage, prepackaged chicken wings and partially cooked roasts from the cooler, Maitland begins carving fresh meat.

A new advertisement for Buehler's featured sale items hit newspapers this morning, and DiBiasio is hoping experience has taught him how much of each product needs to be available to meet customer demand.

### **Systems down**

It's not often that problems arise in DiBiasio's department, but when they do, it's when he appreciates his team the most.



Mattie was the first to notice. The pricing stickers printing from their computer were not matching up to the actual price of an item being featured in the new ad. Customers were supposed to get \$2 off a *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand standing rib roast, and the labels only reflected a \$1 discount.

A phone call to the corporate office assured DiBiasio that the technology team was aware and working to remedy the problem. A few more phone calls quickly revealed that the Medina store was not alone in this glitch.

Another call came from the checkout line. A customer was trying to purchase the item and wanted to get clarification on price. This call would surely be the first of many his team would be called upon to answer.

### **Feathered fury**

It's 10 a.m. and DiBiasio has been so preoccupied that he's not yet picked up a knife. True to trend, another distraction pops up.

A store employee sought him out to handle an odd, if not amusing situation. A landscaper was outside attempting to do his job, but was persistently being interrupted by an angry gander desperately trying to keep him away from a mother goose and her eggs.

When he arrived, the laborer was sitting next to his lawn mower. DiBiasio sidestepped



► DiBiasio and Mary Jo Mattie assess the meat department's coolers, identifying which items need to be shelved before customers arrive.





► A new advertisement for Buehler's featured sale items hit newspapers this morning, and DiBiasio is hoping experience has taught him how much of each product needs to be available to meet customer demand.

from the 1970s while breaking down meat.

It's an homage to his upbringing. His father. His childhood. His career trajectory that was determined long before today.

To outsiders peeking through the pane glass window to the Buehler's Fresh Foods meat department, it's undeniably evident — the meat man is at home.

AY

**Editor's Note:** *Bryan Schaaf is media and communications manager for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB). This article is the second of a "Day in the Life" series of three.*

a feathered dive-bomb on his venture out, and, assessing the situation, pulled the plug on any further beautification efforts to that side of the store until the winged guests vacated.

### The meat meets the metal

By 10:30 a.m., DiBiasio is finally able to settle into his first love. Scanning the checklist of items Maitland hasn't already trimmed, he grabs a chuck roll from the cooler.

With the efficiency of a mechanic methodically taking apart his favorite automobile, DiBiasio quickly turns a Flintstone-sized hunk of meat into an assortment of grill-ready steaks. Judy Rice, another member of the meat department, places Styrofoam trays with each steak into a machine that individually wraps them, and then places a pricing sticker on top.

The corporate pricing snafu has yet to be remedied, but customers are being charged the promised price and are happy.

"The retail business, it's actually pretty easy to figure out, really," DiBiasio says. "You find out what the customer wants, and you give it to them. That's it."

For the next several hours, DiBiasio is allowed to be in his element. Pork butts, rib rolls, top sirloin — his knife glides through them all with a look of ease.

This is where Pat DiBiasio could spend

hour upon hour, jokingly ribbing his coworkers and singing classic rock anthems



► After arriving at the store at 4 a.m., it's 10:30 a.m. before DiBiasio has a chance to grab a knife to join fellow meat cutter Larry Maitland in preparing steaks and roasts for his customers.