

**Wellsville Chamber of Commerce
Chamber Spotlight
Bert's Travel Plaza
By: Lorrie Glass Coffman**

The 29th spotlight for the Wellsville Chamber of Commerce is on Bert's Travel Plaza at 1021 Poplar St. Stan Keim and his two sons are from the small town of Sabetha, KS. They grew up around the truck industry and travelled via automobile for vacations. So they knew what truckers and travelers wanted from a rest stop.

Stan wanted to build his first truck stop, Bert's, in a small town like he lived in, but he wanted it to be a small town close to the city with access to a major highway. Lucky for us, Wellsville fit the description! Stan's son Daniel stated, "We looked at a location off the highway in Edgerton, but it was much more difficult to work with the city of Edgerton and Johnson County. Wellsville was easier to work with."

The project broke ground in 2018 and opened May 1st of 2020. The business employs nearly 50 people and is a full service truck stop with a large parking area for trucks, truck wash on site, large driver's lounge, private showers, laundry machines, and clean restrooms. Bert's also includes fresh cooked food from Champs Chicken, bluTACO and Hunt Brother's Pizza along with a vast variety of Convenience Store items.

When asked what sets Bert's apart from other truck stops, Daniel mentioned his family's knowledge of the trucking industry. He said, "We are a business built by truckers for truckers." Bert's has a 24-hour cleaning crew, and if you go out to look on the website, you will see multiple reviews about the cleanliness of the place. Daniel told me that the customers service and management made up of small town people makes for a more friendly experience.

The business has received many accolades over the past couple of years. In 2020, Bert's received the Rookie of the Year award for demonstrating high sales, excellent customer service and cashiers and clean bathrooms. Recently, the business received the Store of Distinction award from Pro Foods Systems (PFS), the owner of Champs and bluTACO. To top it all off, Bert's received the Independent Truck Stop of the Year award from Trucker Path, an app used by most truckers. This is the most prestigious award they've received to date and are flattered and humbled that fellow truckers were enjoying their vision of a great truck stop.

As for challenges, like all of us, Bert's has had their share, too. With COVID, the job market has become more competitive, so Bert's has to compete with other businesses for top talent. And with the gas and food increases, they have had to adjust accordingly, even though they tried to tough it out for a while without raising prices.

A typical day in the truck stop business includes ordering and receiving products, stocking the shelves, cleaning the store, showers and bathrooms, scheduling the employees, customer service, laundry, ATF inspections which require Bert's to keep on

top of the cigarette and alcohol laws, food inspections and fire inspections, along with weights and measures inspections and trucker training.

When asked what they would do differently if they had it all to do over again, Bert's manager, Kim stated, "I wouldn't put the kitchen in the middle, so I wouldn't have to man the cash register at both ends of the building 24/7. It would have been nice to be able to only have one entrance for the nighttime hours." Also, she wishes Bert's had a drive through.

Bert's really appreciates the support they have received from Franklin county and the local residents who come in for food and convenience store items. They also feel that the police and the locals do a great job of "keeping an eye" on the place. It makes them feel welcome, safe and part of the community.

When asked what our community could do to help take Bert's to the next level, I was told they would like to hear from us. It's helpful to tell them what fruits and veggies you'd like them to carry, which is a HUGE bonus for our town. They have recently been experimenting with veggie trays, kabobs, fruit trays and even a fruit pizza! All items have been well received. They can get fresh food shipments up to three times per week so stop by and tell a cashier or manager what items you'd be interested in buying there. They will do their best to accommodate y our request.

As for business goals, Bert's is hoping to maintain the offering they currently have as well as adding some new offerings over the next few years. As a sneak peak, a couple of those exciting offerings may be even stronger WIFI and a business center for truckers and travelers.

To stay tuned for all the other great advances going on out at Bert's, you can find them online at www.bertsstore.com, call them at 785-816-7006, or better yet, drop in to say hello and see all the place has to offer.

