

STAFFORD'S STILL STANDING



RECORDER PHOTO BY CHIEKO HARA

The Staffords get busy behind the counter Wednesday in preparation for the holiday season.

The candy fam can

In the wake of the death of famed local chocolatier Larry Stafford, the Stafford family has continued their father's dream

By AARON BURGIN
THE PORTERVILLE RECORDER

Jenny Stafford said she wasn't going into the family business. She loved Stafford's Famous Chocolates, the store bearing the namesake of her late father, Larry Stafford. She has fond memories of helping her father put sprinkles on a fresh Bordeaux, or sleeping in the back of the shop during the holidays.

It just wasn't a career choice she envisioned.

That was before July 24 — a day that changed not only Jenny's future, but the entire family's course.

"My goals have been to be a professor," Jenny Stafford said. "But I knew that all of us were going to have step in if the business was to survive."

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RECORDER PHOTO BY CHIEKO HARA

Shoppers pick up their orders Wednesday at Stafford's Famous Chocolates store in Porterville.

STAFFORD: Family is making more chocolate than ever

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After 20 years of delivering sweets to Porterville residents and beyond, Larry Stafford died that day at age 59.

In the wake of his death, the family had to balance grieving with keeping the family business alive — a business of which only the late Stafford knew the ins and outs.

Speculation abounded that by taking the recipes for ooey gooey bars and delectable truffles to the grave, Larry Stafford's death marked the end of the store.

Six months later, Stafford's is alive and thriving due to the synergy of a family whose members would not let a father's dream die.

"We knew that it was going to be hard," said Zachary Stafford, who helps manage the store during breaks from school.

The 23-year-old Stafford attends California State University, Bakersfield. He created the new point-of-sale system that better tracks the total sales and poundage of goodies sold: This Christmas, they have sold 2,700 pounds, more than ever before.

"We each had to make sacrifices," Zachary Stafford said.

Jenny Stafford postponed starting college at University of California at Santa Barbara, choosing to attend Porterville College in the fall.

Older sister Katie Stafford returned from college at California State University, Humboldt during the holidays.

And mother Marilyn, while enduring the loss of

her betrothed, went to school to learn the chocolate trade, in addition to her full-time job as a high school science teacher.

Together, with other employees, they bonded and learned the secrets many thought were lost with the family patriarch.

"We started learning last Christmas," Jenny Stafford said. "We had been doing it since we were young, but that was when we really started to pick it up.

"For us, it was hard at first, harder than most people think," she continued, recounting the time the clan watched a stressed candy rack collapse, spoiling 1,000 pounds of cremes.

"But now, we're not only making the chocolates that our father created, we're creating our own creations as well," Jenny Stafford said.

The result — they have made more chocolate than ever, and the camaraderie between the family and other employees has increased.

Most importantly, Marilyn said, the family has had the biggest shoulder to lean on — the community.

"They have been there for us through it all, in so many ways," Marilyn said. "I don't know if we could have done it without them. That is what I like about a small town."

The community appreciates them, too.

"You miss seeing his smile and his friendliness," said Sharon Silvery, a long-time patron. "I think that they are doing a fantastic job."

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