

BUSINESS SUCCESS STORIES, part four**From Meadowglen's dark, damp cellars...**

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Monday, after a lapse of 20 years, Meadowglen Mushroom Growers Ltd. started selling their crop, fresh and canned, retail.

This means Halton Hills residents can skip the grocery chain line-ups and buy fresh-picked mushrooms from the Glen Williams plant on Mountainview Road North.

Owner Ernie Skrow said the move to retail sales at the plant followed numerous requests from the public and tour groups.

Because of daily truck traffic in and out of the plant, he said he'd never allowed it before.

Long an employer in the Glen, Meadowglen was founded in the early 1940s by Dr. McGibbon of Georgetown and associates George Fawcett, Bob Jones and Will Anderson.

In 1960, Mr. Skrow bought the business with his father.

Back then, the company grew 177,000 pounds of mushrooms and wasn't just into the mushroom business, Mr. Skrow said. There were orchards of



Grown in Glen Williams, these fleshy white mushrooms are all hand-picked. Over 20 years, Manuel DaLima has been working in the mushroom "houses" at Meadowglen Mushroom Growers Ltd. Using a miner's lamp to pick the fruits of his labor, Mr. DaLima works in the dark mushroom houses where two floors of six beds each produce the mushrooms that are sent across Canada and the world. All mushrooms are hand-picked because machine picking causes too much waste. (Herald photo)

fruit being grown and sold as well.

Cutting out the harvest from the orchards, the Skrows concentrated on mushrooms.

Back in 1960, mushrooms could only be grown nine months of the year. The growing season depended entirely on environmental conditions and rarely were any mushrooms harvested in the summer, Mr. Skrow said.

YEAR ROUND

Through years of experience, mushrooms are now grown all year round, and today, Meadowglen grows over five million pounds of the white non-calorie vegetable annually.

To match the growth in production since 1960, the company staff has swelled from 18 to 150 and the company has expanded from merely growing mushrooms to processing them as well.

What do mushrooms like in order to bloom? Mr. Skrow said they like protein, which they get in the form of nitrogen, and phosphorus, potash, urea, alfalfa, timothy hay, brewers grain, gypsum

and 85 per cent humidity. They also prefer a temperature between 58 and 62 degrees Fahrenheit, Mr. Skrow said.

Once the mushrooms are picked, if they're refrigerated at 33 to 35 degrees, they'll last three to four weeks, he said. As long as they aren't removed from a cool place, they'll stay fresh for that length of time.

Discoloring of mushrooms has nothing to do with loss of flavor, Mr. Skrow explained. In fact, as they brown, they become more flavorful - as long as they're not mushy or black.

PURE WHITE

People think mushrooms should be a pure white and that's what they look for in the supermarkets, but Mr. Skrow thinks they're tastier if they're brown. He should know; he eats them at least three times a week. However, if you buy them brown, he advises using them right away.

Mushrooms aren't good travellers, so Meadowglen supplies them fresh only to nearby large population areas like Toronto and Hamilton. To more distant Canadian cities and internationally, it sends its mushrooms off in cans.

On a trip to Antigua once, Mr. Skrow found, to his delight and amusement, a ten ounce can of Meadowglen mushrooms sitting on a store shelf, selling for the hefty price of \$4.20. Because his product is distributed by other companies like Stafford Foods and Canada Packers, he never knows where

he'll find it.

The fact that fresh mushrooms don't travel well serves as protection from offshore competition for Mr. Skrow's business. However, there is no protection for his canned goods.

The cannery was opened in 1971 and only operates twice a week, because demand is low due to the foreign competition in Canada, Mr. Skrow said. The modern facility which can produce three to four million pounds of canned mushrooms a month is only running at 50 per cent capacity, canning about two million pounds.

All in all it's a five minute procedure to bathe, grade, blanch, inspect, chop and fill the cans with Meadowglen mushrooms, Mr. Skrow said proudly. With 14 employees, the machinery can run 3,000 pounds of mushrooms an hour.

"A lot of people think there's no benefit in mushrooms," Mr. Skrow said. "But actually, it's the second highest low-calorie protein vegetable. It's second to green peas."

This is according to a very recent university study in California on the nutritional value of mushrooms, which found that the much maligned vegetable is high in protein and phosphorus. The federal government is currently undertaking a similar study, Mr. Skrow said.

A real mushroom lover, Mr. Skrow has visions for the future of mushrooms in the Glen. He dreams of opening a mushroom boutique, "Everything Mush-

room", where aprons and crafts decorated with mushrooms, along with bottles of pickled and breaded mushrooms can be sold. As well, he'd like to open a restaurant with a menu specializing in mushrooms.

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That's quite a smell, but it's sure worth it!

What's that earthy smell on foggy days? Most Glen Williams residents are ready to tell you where it's coming from with little prompting and a lot of nose pinching.

That earthy smell that gets strong on foggy days and goes down to hang in the valley is coming from the compost piles at the Meadowglen Mushroom Growers Ltd. company on Mountainview Road South.

"We're the original recyclers," claims Meadowglen owner Ernie Skrow. "We turn waste into food."

Collected from the Mohawk and Greenwood racetracks as well as ABC Farms, horse droppings, hay and straw are piled up on the rolling acres of Meadowglen property to mature.

When a compost pile sits undisturbed for some time, it builds up heat which causes the smell.

As the compost heap matures, steam begins rolling off the top and the temperature reaches 175 degrees Fahrenheit. At this point it's forked onto wooden beds and put, two floors of six beds deep, into a "house".

In the house begins the process which prepares the compost to sprout that umbrella shaped, fleshy



fungus called a mushroom.

The compost is pastured with steam, covered with a plastic sheet so that mould, called mycelium (young mushroom), begins to grow. The bed is next smothered over with one and a half inches of soil so that oxygen supply is cut off to the growing mushroom.

This soil encourages the mycelium to root up to reach the oxygen above, upon which it sprouts into its familiar umbrella shape.

It takes 45 days for mushrooms to come to maturation from the compost stage, then follows a 90-day cycle of picking from the same bed.

Mr. Skrow said mushrooms are picked by hand because with machines there's a 40 per cent waste.

Most of his employees are local or commute from Toronto or Hamilton. Before, he used to bring in a lot of Jamaican and offshore Mexican help. Now, with the current state of unemployment, he is able to fill his staffing needs with Canadians, he said.

Flies, especially fruit flies, are the biggest enemy to the mushroom harvest, Mr. Skrow said.

Last year, he said his company was down 1.4 million pounds from 1980 because of flies. They only produced 3.6 million pounds of mushrooms.

With a number of precautions taken this year against flies, Mr. Skrow is hopeful his mushroom harvest will be up again.

Inventive recipes**A million ways to eat mushrooms**

Looking for ways to get more of that great mushroom flavor? Your local mushroom grower is the one to ask. Meadowglen Mushroom Growers Ltd. owner Ernie Skrow has dozens of suggestions; he'll even get you a copy of "Mushrooms at Home", published by the Canadian Mushroom Growers Association. If you like mushrooms, you'll LOVE these recipes:

CRAB-STUFFED MUSHROOMS

1 pound medium mushrooms (about 24)
1 8-ounce tin crabmeat
1 egg, well beaten
1/4 cup fine bread crumbs
1/4 cup tomato juice
1 teaspoon lemon juice
Dash of Tabasco
1 teaspoon finely chopped onion
2 teaspoons finely chopped celery
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup bread crumbs
1/4 cup melted butter or margarine

Early in day, wash mushrooms and dry thoroughly. Remove stems and store in 'frig for use in other dishes. Mix together crabmeat, egg, 1/4 cup bread crumbs, tomato juice, lemon juice, Tabasco, onion, celery and salt. Fill mushroom caps with mixture. Toss the 1/2 cup bread crumbs with the melted butter. Sprinkle over mushroom caps. Place caps on baking sheet. Cover with foil and refrigerate until ready to cook. Remove foil. Broil 5 inches from heat 5 to 8 minutes, or until crumbs are lightly browned; or bake in 350 degree F. oven 15 to 20 minutes.

POULETSUPREME

A nice way to serve Sunday chicken dinner.

2 tablespoons chopped onion
1/4 cup finely chopped celery
1/2 pound (1 pint) mushrooms, chopped
1/4 cup butter or margarine
Salt and pepper
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1/2 cup chopped almonds, toasted (optional)
4 whole chicken breasts (boned)
1/4 cup melted butter
1 cup fine cereal, bread or potato chip crumbs
4 strips bacon, halved

For ease of preparation, use whole (double) chicken breasts. Sauté onion, celery, and mushrooms in butter for about 5 minutes. Add seasonings, lemon juice and nuts. Divide stuffing into equal portions and spoon into the centre of each chicken breast. Fold edges of meat and skin over the filling and secure with skewers. Roll in melted butter, then in crumbs. Place rolls skewer side down in pan and cover with bacon strips. Bake at 350 degrees until tender and golden brown, about 50 minutes. 4 servings. May be served with a mushroom sauce.

HUNGARIAN MUSHROOMS

This recipe indicates the fine blend of flavors achieved when mushrooms and sour cream are cooked together. These are particularly good with noodles and pork chops or meat loaf. To make a delicious supper casserole, add cooked ham, chicken, canned salmon or tuna to the mushrooms.

1/2 pound (1 pint) mushrooms
2 teaspoons sliced green onion
1/4 cup butter
2 teaspoons chopped parsley
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1/4 cup flour (scant)
1 cup chicken bouillon
1/4 cup dairy sour cream
1/4 teaspoon salt
Pepper
Cracker crumbs

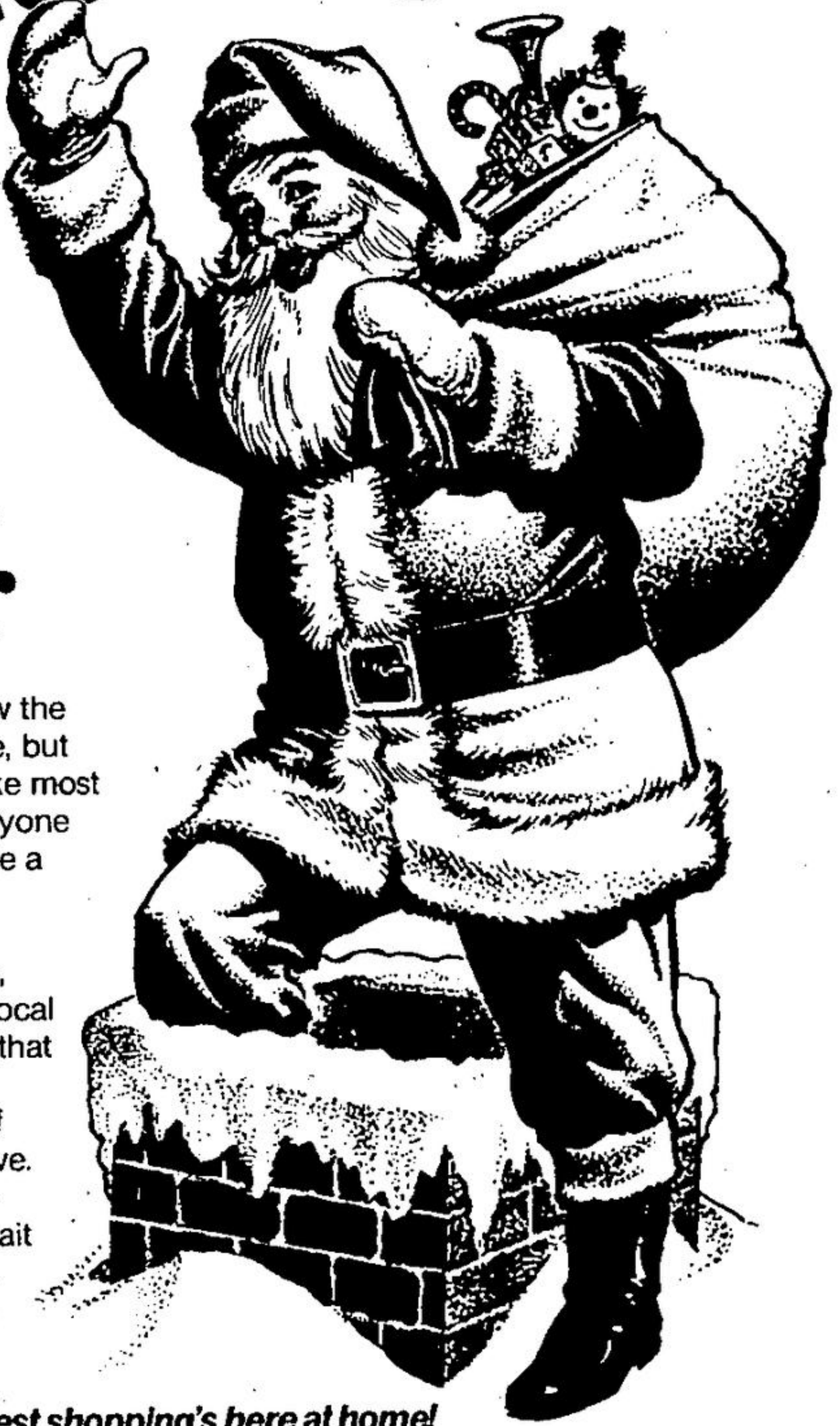
Wash mushrooms; cut large ones in pieces but leave small ones whole. Sauté mushrooms and onion in half the butter about 3 minutes. Pour into a shallow casserole and toss with parsley and paprika. Blend flour into the rest of the butter and any juice left in frying pan. Gradually stir in bouillon and then sour cream, salt and pepper. Heat until thickened, stirring constantly. Pour over mushrooms in casserole, sprinkle with a few cracker crumbs and a dash of paprika. Bake until mushrooms are tender and crumbs begin to brown - 15 to 20 minutes in 350 degree oven. 4 servings.

HO-HO-HO**Your Search Is Over**

Santa always seems to know the right kinds of gifts to choose, but what about you? If you're like most people, buying gifts for everyone on your list can present quite a dilemma.

When you shop local stores, you'll find help... lots of it! Local stores take pride in the fact that their knowledgeable staffs provide you with the kind of service you want and deserve. Great gift suggestions, help with sizes and lots more await you when you shop locally. Shopping locally saves you time, trouble and money.

No need to roam... the best shopping's here at home!



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