

IN

INCOMMUNITY
MAGAZINES

Murrysville

Liquid Gold

Elaine Schweikarth,
owner of The Olive Merchant
in Murrysville, carries the
world's finest olive oils and
balsamic vinegars

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Excelsa
Health

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The Olive Merchant, located on William Penn Highway in Murrysville, has become a destination for foodies. See story on page 32.
Photo by Nicole Tafe.

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IN Community is a publication dedicated to representing, encouraging and promoting the Murrysville area and its comprising municipalities by focusing on the talents and gifts of the people who live and work here. Our goal is to provide readers with the most informative and professional regional publication in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



Photos by Nicole Tafe



Liquid Gold

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

The Olive Merchant draws foodies to Murrysville.

Business owners sometimes find inspiration in unlikely places. Just ask Murrysville's Elaine Schweikarth, who found hers in a vat of gourmet olive oil.

At the time, Schweikarth had been in Albany, New York, visiting her daughter, who was looking forward to showing her mother the Saratoga Olive Oil Company, known for its collection of premium-quality extra virgin olive oils and balsamic vinegars.

Schweikarth was struck by the unique store. As a home cook and a lover of specialty foods, she thought a store like this could do well in a place like Murrysville.

She talked to Saratoga's owners about opening up a store in Murrysville, but it doesn't franchise. Instead, the owner provided her with contact information for Veronica Foods, a distributor of ultra-premium organic olive oils imported from all over the world based in Oakland, California.

With the help of Veronica Foods, Schweikarth took the necessary steps to launch her own store, The Olive Merchant, on William Penn

Highway in Murrysville. The store opened on Sept. 1, 2014, and was an instant draw for food lovers from Murrysville and beyond.

"I am amazed at how many people in the area are food conscious and concerned about what they put in their bodies," Schweikarth says. "There are some real foodies in Murrysville."

Customers come from all over the area and from as far away as Indiana, she says, and business is thriving.

"I'd say that 99.9 percent of the customers who come in the store end up buying something. It's rare that they don't — and then it's usually only because they're in a hurry," she says with a laugh.

Customers entering the store are greeted by dozens of glimmering vats of oil called "fustis," as well as their accompanying bottled balsamic vinegars. The oils arrive at the store in sealed jugs. Schweikarth bottles all of the oil in the store so that it's fresh; once it's exposed to the air and light, it must be used within three to six months to glean the freshest taste and health benefits, she says.

The olives used in the products are picked, crushed and pressed within four hours of harvest, and all of the oils are organic, gluten-free and 100 percent natural. Infused oils are made by adding flavor to ready-made olive oils, while fused oils are made by crushing fruit or herbs with the olives and pressing them together. The oils are imported from all over the world, including Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Chile, Australia, and Tunisia, as well as from California.



The balsamic vinegars are imported from Modena, Italy, and are produced using the Solera method, an excruciatingly slow, barrel-aging process that allows the vinegar to thicken over time, on its own, with no added ingredients.

Schweikarth rotates the oils and vinegars seasonally, although a few—such as the Tuscan and garlic olive oils, traditional dark balsamic vinegar and cranberry-pear white balsamic vinegar—have become customer favorites and top sellers. Every customer who enters the store is invited to taste the selections using samples of fresh bread for dipping. Passionate about her business, Schweikarth offers suggestions for combining the oils and vinegars together. The lemon white balsamic vinegar, for instance, pairs nicely with the Tuscan oil, while chocolate balsamic paired with espresso balsamic can make a piece of Italian bread taste like a slice of tiramisu. “Once people taste them, they’re wowed by them,” she says.

Schweikarth also touts the health benefits of consuming all-natural olive oils and vinegars, pointing to studies that have shown that olive oil can help reduce the risk of type II diabetes, improve heart-arterial function, fight osteoporosis, decrease blood pressure and reduce symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis. Olive oils contain monounsaturated fatty acids, which are healthy dietary fats, according to the Mayo Clinic.



Photos by Nicole Taft

“There are two valid reasons to consume olive oil: first, to impart flavor to food and, second, to reap its health benefits,” she says.

The Olive Merchant also carries a variety of other specialty foods, including flavored sea salts and pastas and premium Tea Forté teas. Stonewall Kitchen foods and Bedillion Honey Farm honey, Aromatique candle and fragrance products and Out of the Woods of Oregon cutting boards have been added to the inventory. The store sells gift baskets and bags, as well as gift cards, and offers a loyalty card in which customers can earn a free 200 milliliter bottle of oil or vinegar after purchasing 10.

The Olive Merchant welcomes groups who would like to come in for “tasting parties,” and periodically hosts open houses where customers can come taste the oils and vinegars as well as select foods.

For more information about The Olive Merchant, visit theolivemerchant.net or call 724.519.8576. ■

