

**P.30** PORK'S TOUGH MOUTH  
BEHAVIOR CHALLENGES

**P.58** DEWIG MEATS'  
FAMILY FORMULA

**P.68** DUNLOP MOVES  
ON UP

05.22 [meatingplace.com](http://meatingplace.com)

# meatingplace<sup>®</sup>

## Rare finds

**The Power of Meat report**  
explores the new frontier  
of consumer preferences

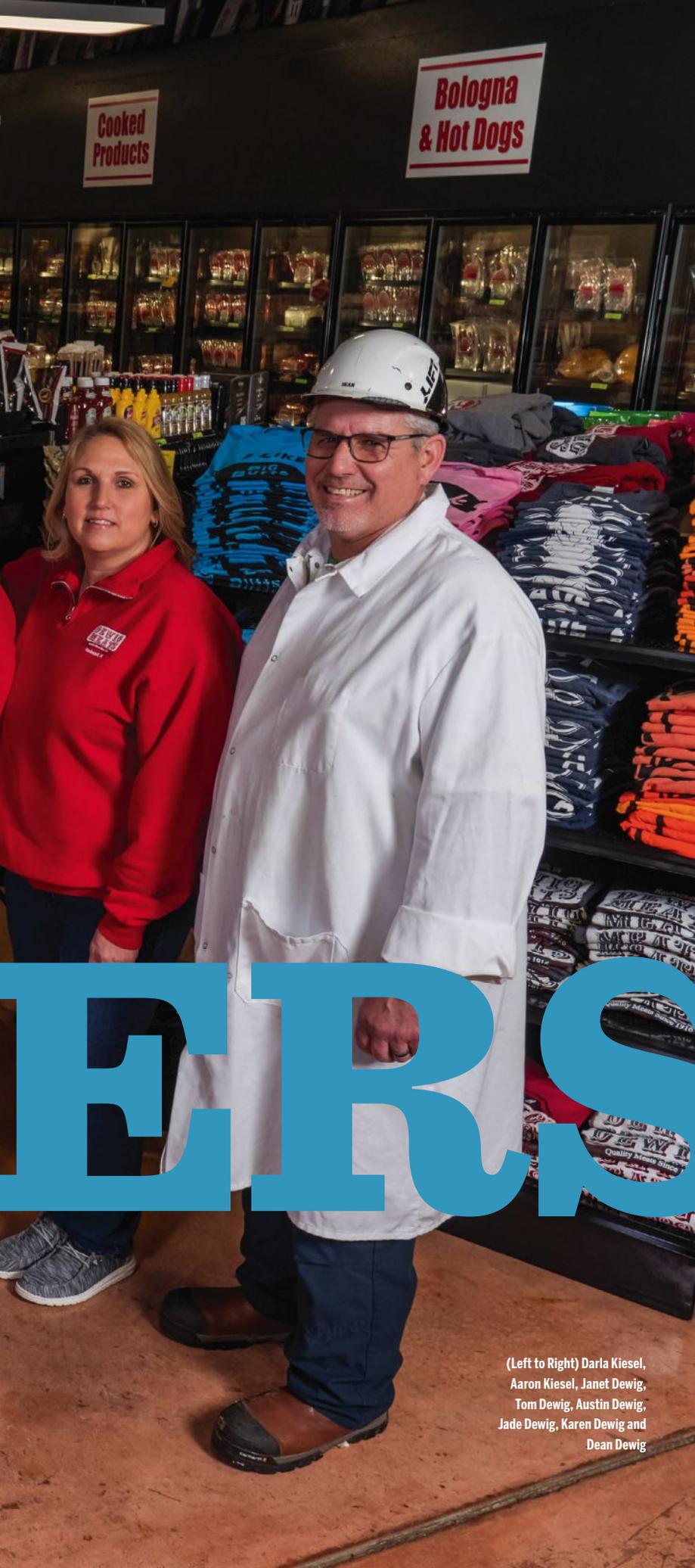




# Family MATTERS

**Dewig Meats** brings a history of innovation and ambition to its multi-generation family operation.

*by* Peter Thomas Ricci, managing editor



(Left to Right) Darla Kiesel, Aaron Kiesel, Janet Dewig, Tom Dewig, Austin Dewig, Jade Dewig, Karen Dewig and Dean Dewig

Photos by Whitney Curtis

### “This was pretty funny.”

That’s how Janet Dewig, co-owner of Dewig Meats in Haubstadt, Ind., begins her story about the time she and husband/co-owner Tom Dewig visited an IBM sales office to purchase a computer.

It was 1985, and business at the family-owned meat processor was booming — so much so, in fact, that Janet was having trouble keeping track of client order histories. Desiring a more elegant, fool-proof system, Janet and Tom visited the IBM office in nearby Evansville, Ind., to assess their options. The reception, Janet recalls, was not exactly warm.

“These guys all had their white shirts and ties, and I’ll never forget the cufflinks,” Janet explains. “When we went in and told them we were interested in [a computer], they looked at us, laughed, and said, ‘Why would anyone in the meat business need a computer?’”

That computer — a pre-Windows machine that ran the MS-DOS operating system — cost the Dewigs \$35,000, and then another \$37,000 for the programming fee. But for Janet, it was a worthwhile investment. Not only did the IBM seamlessly handle Dewig Meats’ expanding business, it also required zero debugging or maintenance calls until the business upgraded to Windows machines in the late ‘90s.

“We were afraid that some of our older customers wouldn’t appreciate having to deal with this computer, because they’d never seen one before,” Janet says. “They loved it! Because we had a way of going back and looking [at older orders].”

Beyond the culture-clash humor of Janet’s tale, however, is a telling demonstration of why Dewig Meats has been a mid-South meat processing institution



To learn about another family-owned meat processor, read [meatm.ag/nicholas-meat](https://meatm.ag/nicholas-meat)

## COMPANY *profile*



In 2011, Dewig Meats completed construction of a 12,000-square-foot retail space next to its processing facility in Haubstadt, Ind.

**“A business is either going up or down – it never runs level. We try to stay on the upward swing of it.”**

for more than a century. Motivated by a commitment to its customers, Dewig invested in a cutting-edge technology that was, at the time, so fresh to meatpackers that IBM’s own salespeople thought it a gag.

And that unique blend of local intimacy and uncommon ambition continues in the present day, with Dean Dewig and Darla Kiesel — son and daughter to Tom and Janet — now the third generation to run the family business.

“My father was fortunate that his dad liked to see change,” Dean says. “He didn’t want the place stay the same. And I’m fortunate that my father and mother want to see change, too. They like keeping things updated so we’re not stagnant. A business is either going up or down — it never runs level. We try to stay on the upward swing of it.”

Dean continues, “They say the third generation is the one that usually runs [the business] in the ground. We’re trying to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

### A BRAGGING POINT

Launched in 1916 by the original three Dewig brothers, Dewig Meats covers a retail and foodservice circuit that stretches from northern Indiana to

St. Louis to Louisville. Through their pork and beef processing (which includes their own cattle from a nearby feedlot), Dewig sells a large assortment of fresh meat products, including a wide range of smoked and encased meats. And courtesy of Aaron Kiesel — Darla’s husband, who directs Dewig’s cured meats — the processor has received dozens of association awards for its products. At the 2021 AAMP conference alone, Dewig received both the “Cured Meats Excellence” award and the “Best in Show” award, along with 10 additional awards for specific products (with five taking first-place honors).

The processor’s longevity, along with its tradition of success, is a source of pride for Dean.

“It’s a little bit of a bragging point, because I can go into a lot of places and say to people, ‘All right, we’ve been in business for longer than you’ve been here,’” Dean says. “So we know a little something about the meat business.”

And consistent with his parents’ early adoption of electronic filing, Dean has guided Dewig through a number of production and retail innovations that have doubled the processor’s business in the 20 years since he assumed day-to-day management responsibilities. Some recent improvements include: expanded stock pens, which moved



## AT A GLANCE

**COMPANY**  
DEWIG MEATS

**LOCATION**  
HAUBSTADT, IND.

**FOUNDED**  
1916

**LEADERSHIP**  
TOM & JANET DEWIG, CO-OWNERS;  
DEAN DEWIG, PRESIDENT, GENERAL MANAGER, CO-OWNER;  
KAREN DEWIG, RETAIL & OFFICE MANAGER, CO-OWNER;  
DARLA KIESEL, FINANCE MANAGER, CO-OWNER;  
AARON KIESEL, PROCESSED & SMOKED MEATS MANAGER, CO-OWNER;  
AUSTIN DEWIG, PLANT MANAGER;  
JADE DEWIG, RETAIL & OFFICE ASSISTANT MANAGER

**PLANTS**  
ONE BEEF/PORK FACILITY WITH RETAIL MEAT MARKET

**EMPLOYEES**  
70-80

**PRODUCTS**  
FRESH AND SMOKED PORK, SAUSAGES, FRESH AND GROUND BEEF

**CUSTOMERS**  
RETAIL, FOODSERVICE, WHOLESALE

“We have always treated this plant like it’s an extension of our family.”



Dean Dewig, the processor’s president, trims meat alongside his workers.

from the front of the plant to its rear; a new freezer and warehouse; a backup generator system; the 2015 launch of the Pappa Bear catering services; and most significantly, the 2011 construction of a 12,000-square-foot retail meat market, which Dewig built as an extension on its Haubstadt processing plant.

All those innovations, though, may pale in comparison to what Dean and Darla have planned next — an all-new slaughter facility, and then an expansion of the current processing space where hogs and cattle are currently slaughtered. The siblings are currently assessing blueprints for an estimated 2025 completion, with the aim of “significantly” expanding weekly slaughter capacity from the current 50 cattle and 150 hogs.

“We’ve just run out of room in this old building,” Dean explains. “We’re at an odd size — we’re too little to be big, and we’re too big to be little, so we want to make sure that if we do something like this, we’re confident we have enough business to support it.”

### WHEN YOU’RE HERE, YOU’RE FAMILY

As the processor’s general manager, Dean handles everything from meat cutting to plumbing. And though such disparate responsibilities mean long hours, one aspect of the work, he says,

makes such commitments more bearable. “I’m probably here as much as I am at home,” he says. “But I’m pretty fortunate — my whole family is over here, too.”

But while Dewig Meats is a family operation through and through — Dean’s parents, sister, brother in law, and children are all deeply involved in the daily operations — those familial bonds extend beyond the specific members of the Dewig clan.

“We have always treated this plant like it’s an extension of our family,” Darla Kiesel says. “The employees are of the most important value to us, [and] we have always been very generous to them.”

So while Dewig’s smaller size, Darla continues, means no vacation time during December or holiday weeks, there is also no strict policy for personal days or time off, and that flexibility pays dividends at an interpersonal level.

“They’re our friends,” Darla says. “Yes, they’re our employees, but we try to make sure this is a great working environment for them. And we do that just by talking to them. Through simple conversations with them, you learn about their family, what sports teams they like, and all kinds of things.”

Those interactions, Darla says, have granted her a unique familiarity with the plant’s 70-odd workers. Pointing out the

various members on the cutting floor, she immediately details the workers’ families, their anniversaries, and other notable aspects of their lives.

Additionally, Dean prides himself on working shoulder-to-shoulder with all his workers — “I wouldn’t have any of the employees do anything that I won’t do myself,” he says — and such connections foster total transparency on plant operations.

“We’ve always been very open with our employees,” he says. “If there’s an issue, we want to know it ... being very open with them really helps the flow of production.”

Dean continues, “They’re not scared to tell us, ‘Hey, we’re cutting these ribeyes and they’re not yielding well. You might want to watch your prices on this.’ Or, ‘That cooler I was in did not seem as cold as it should be.’ I better go check on that.”

And beyond the day-to-day operations of the plant, Darla and Dean’s commitments to their workers have shielded them from the relentless turnover that so many processors have struggled with during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Dean summarizes, “We treat them nice.”

### AN ACTIVE MEMBER

Being around as long as they have, Darla says it is common for fellow meatpackers to contact the Dewig team for advice.

“We do a lot of helping other meatpack-

# COMPANY *profile*

ers with equipment, with business ideas, things like that,” she says.

Another key factor is being involved with meatpacking associations.

“If you tell me you’re having problem curing a ham, I can give you three different people you should call to ask them [for advice],” says Darla, who will become AAMP’s president in 2023. “Maybe your smokehouse is not producing enough smoke — okay, I can help you with that. The network is pretty amazing.”

Such a network, though, was not always locally available to Indiana meatpackers, and Darla played a key role in its creation.

Previously, a meatpacking association existed for the Great Lakes region, which included Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Ohio. Although the association hosted conventions, its territorial expanse proved difficult for members, and states eventually broke off to form their own associations. Initially, that was to the detriment of the Indiana Meat Packers & Processors Association — when Darla became its executive secretary in 2018, the association’s membership had dwindled to 49 packers.

The association’s future lay south of the state border. Realizing that Kentucky lacked a formal meatpacking associa-



Brother and sister duo Dean Dewig and Darla Kiesel are the third generation of Dewig Meats family leadership.

“**They say the third generation is the one that usually runs [the business] in the ground.** We’re trying to make sure that doesn’t happen, this time around.”

## CARBON CAPTURE



SECURE SUPPLY AND REDUCE COSTS

## CO<sub>2</sub> STORAGE



HORIZONTAL & VERTICAL TANKS

## NITROGEN STORAGE



BULK TANKS, MICROBULK, & LIQUID CYLINDERS

## DRY ICE SOLUTIONS



PELLETS, BLOCKS, SNOW

## FOOD FREEZING



CO<sub>2</sub> & NITROGEN READY

We provide solutions for CO<sub>2</sub> shortages, allocations, supply disruptions & force majeure...

**CHANGE THE WAY YOU  
THINK ABOUT CO<sub>2</sub>**

**TOMCO<sub>2</sub>**  
SYSTEMS®

## COMPANYprofile

tion, Darla and other Indiana association members began inviting Kentucky meatpackers to their association, and they've since increased their membership to 106 packers. The association maintains a busy docket: It hosts a yearly convention with various classes and education sessions, and in 2020 it conducted a regional tour that included Indiana's board of animal health and the state's lieutenant governor.

The association has also proven a pivotal resource for grants. It has secured a grant through Indiana's department of agriculture for 41 meatpacking facilities, and has assisted Dewig's in its own expansion plans.

"We started dabbling in grants about two years ago, and right off the bat, I realized I needed some help, because

day-to-day tasks pulled me from writing the grant," Darla says. "There are grants available, but there are many specifications. You have to make sure you meet those specifications."

Thus, the network kicked in. After reaching out to Indiana's agriculture department, Darla accessed a list of grant writers and "really hit it off" with one based near Indianapolis. The grant writer now sends bimonthly summaries of available grants and assesses which ones are relevant to Dewig's needs.

The grant process, Darla says, ultimately demonstrates her key piece of advice: "There's so much value in being an active member of an association," she explains. "There's value in being a member, but there's much more value in being an active member."



Aaron Kiesel (left), who manages Dewig Meats' processed and smoked meats, is a Cured Meat Hall of Fame inductee.

# FEWER PATHOGENS FEWER HEADACHES

### MAKING FOOD SAFER WITH:

-  PROCESSING AIDS
-  SMART EQUIPMENT
-  ANALYTICS SOFTWARE
-  CONSULTING SERVICES



TRUSTED PEOPLE,  
TRUSTED SOLUTIONS



PARTNER TO ACHIEVE  
YOUR GOALS



LOOK THROUGH A  
FOOD SAFETY LENS

TALK TO OUR FOOD SAFETY EXPERTS TODAY

 1.501.758.8500  info@safefoods.net

WWW.SAFEFOODS.NET

WWW.SAFEFOODS.NET

WWW.SAFEFOODS.NET



*I just like the managing side – making sure everything gets done.*

If somebody gets sick, I like hopping in there and knowing I can do their job.



## AUSTIN DEWIG

**COMPANY**  
DEWIG MEATS

**PLANT**  
HAUBSTADT, IND.

**JOB TITLE**  
PLANT MANAGER

**YEARS ON THE JOB**  
SEVEN

**HOMETOWN**  
HAUBSTADT, IND.

**CAREER GOAL**  
"MAKING THE BUSINESS BIGGER – MY DAD HAS DOUBLED THE SIZE SINCE HE TOOK OVER, AND I WOULD LIKE TO CONTINUE THAT [WHEN I TAKE OVER]."

**FAVORITE HOBBIES**  
SKIING AND WORKING ON CARS. "WE GO ON ONE OR TWO SKIING TRIPS EACH YEAR. DAD GREW UP SKIING, SO WHEN I LEARNED TO WALK, I LEARNED TO SKI."