

The apples don't fall from the tree in the Soons family; they haven't since 1910

By Cooper Diamond

Soon's Orchards in New Hampton grows and sells locally produced food such as fruits and vegetables, baked goods, snacks and dairy. However, over the course of their 113 years, they have gained a reputation in the local community for one particular crop: apples.

Trinka O'Connor, a retired teacher and Soons employee for four years, often finds herself in the Soons's Market selling apples to customers.

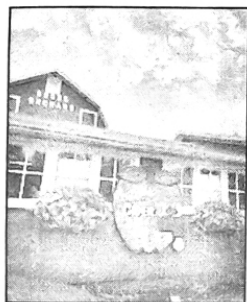
"It's like I'm trying to match a person to their apple," said O'Connor. "I ask people, 'do you like crunchy? Do likesweet? Do you like tart?' Every apple seems to have a personality and so to try to match that apple with the customer, it is sometimes frustrating if you do not make the right match. But that is okay. We might two, three, four different apples till they find one they like and then you send the person off happy with something good."



Expanded Orchard Hill Cider Tasting Room

There are 85 types of apples for customers to choose, from the Golden Delicious to the Braeburn to the Northern Spy.

"The fresh apples and fresh fruit of course



they were not about to sell them," said Art Soons. William Soons took a gamble on some previously unsuccessful land in New Hampton. The move would pay off.

Two generations later, Art Soons explained, *"We've made a farm out of a pile of rocks. Nobody ever made it here until our family bought this farm. Everybody else went bankrupt. They did not even last three years. There is a lot of things you have got up keep in mind when you are farming here and you better learn the lessons quick. Many did not learn; but, we are still here. If you had taken a survey in this whole area; say within five miles and asked everybody on all the other farms their thoughts about how long we would last, they would have said three years. Obviously they were wrong; I am quite proud of that."*

Not that it was always easy. At first, William Soons had trouble getting used to the environment. *"The roads were either mud, or clay, or dirt or dust; sometimes all of the above. When my father came up the first time to the farm, he got off at New Hampton. He wrote it in his diary that night that he was so depressed coming up here that the wagon*

had a wife and children and he did not go out."

William Soons instead took the Erie Railroad north from New York City in search of farmwork.

"By 1910, the best lands had been gone. Everybody owned them and

from Princeton in the Korean War.

The family operation of the farm is not the only aspect of the business that spans generations. Many of the patrons you might see in Soons Orchards today are not first-generation customers.

Carol Williams, a third-generation customer, says she has *"many family members and friends always come over here because everything they have is always delicious."*

"We were the first generation to come here but other generations following ours have come here, too," said Bruce Thompson, a resident of the Town of Goshen. "We've been coming here for probably 30 years. Our daughter and son-in-law come here, and they bring their three children."

"It is really nice to have many customers who come in and say, 'I have been shopping here for 20, 30 or 40 years. You have changed, everything looks so wonderful, cannot wait to come back,'" said O'Connor.

Linda Sharon says she *"likes the fact that it is a family business."*

Art Soons is definitely the patriarch of the family, but he's not the only Soons family member spending their days working the farm.

Art's daughter, Sharon Soons, is in charge of the retail operations while his son, Jeff Soons, also a Princeton graduate and a lawyer, is responsible for the field and cider mill operations. Another daughter, Laura is also on the farm as part of the family compound. The road known as Soons Circle is the address for family members and a few key orchard personnel, each in their own homes. In the thick of that enclave, is the home of Scotty's Country Kitchen; owned and operated since 1987 by Laura Soons and her husband Scott Thornton. Scotty's Pies and other baked delectables are mainstays at many farm-