



Co-owner Michael Myers behind McNan's Variety Foods deli counter, 2020

In 2006, we needed to move, and luckily, my sister in law was a realtor at the time. She showed us one house in Mellenville, and then, as the Philmont Catholic Church had just closed its doors, she showed us the rectory, where the priest had been living, right on Main Street. I'm a country boy. I like to be out where my nearest neighbor is about 3 miles away. This was right in the middle of Philmont, and from its outside appearance, I wasn't very interested. But as I stepped onto the porch, Father Ray came out and met me. He shook my hand warmly and was very welcoming. As soon as I walked in, I felt like I was home. I walked around and I felt that this was it, as much for the house as because of his warm welcome. That day, I was not with my wife, Nancy, but it was her birthday, by the way--December 15. When we went back together, she saw the beautiful staircase and the Italian marble fireplaces, and she fell in love with the house immediately, too. I said, Nancy, make it work! Which she did.

Buying the house was a long process because it had to be taken off the church roll and put back on the tax rolls. The Albany Diocese had to sign off. The Pope had to say it was okay! But they let us move in on March 15--which was Nancy's father's birthday, by the way. We closed finally two months later, on May 16, which was my mother's birthday, by the way--and mine is a day later. But all the birthdays are not even the coolest thing about this story. The day we got the keys and started moving in, we went to Dad's Diner in Copake for breakfast. It was a Sunday and the place was mobbed. There were no tables at all. We kept poking our heads in, waiting. Finally, a lovely older woman sitting alone at a booth asked us if we'd like to join her. Her name

was Helen and we started telling her that we were moving to Philmont, and she asked us where. We said, the Catholic church rectory, and she said, "That's fascinating!" She had been married in that house--not in the church but in the rectory--on that very day exactly 41 years earlier! We celebrated together the following year, and the year after that, on the same date. All these important dates! We really felt this was meant to be!

I was the executive chef of the Simmons Way Village Inn in Millerton at the time, and so I was commuting. Nancy was commuting to work, too. So we didn't know many people here. We didn't think that 7 years later, in 2013, we'd open a small county market--we call it McNan's Variety Foods because it's a cute mixture of our first names (Michael and Nancy). We're right here in Philmont, where we would soon know *everybody* in the village!

Philmont gets a bad rep sometimes, but we've met the best of people here. For example, we were getting a lot of kids coming in after school, and they didn't have much money on them. They'd have a dollar, for example, and could only afford to get candy or chips. We wanted to give them something healthier, so we started selling them half sandwiches for a dollar. Some days, we'd ask, are you hungry? And we'd give them a whole sandwich for the same dollar, and they'd be so excited. One day, someone saw us doing that and decided to give us money to start a sandwich fund for the kids. And then more folks gave. It was word of mouth; people told more people, and soon locals were just coming in and anonymously paying it forward so that we could continue offering sandwiches to the children after school. We never solicited any donations, but they came in anyway. After that, the Philmont Reformed Church and the Craryville United Methodist Church asked if they could sponsor the sandwiches. This is an example of the caring, big-hearted people we have found here.

Our neighbors continue to surprise us with their generosity. On the 4th anniversary of our opening the store, Karen Garafalo and Mary Potts told everyone to bring us flowers--and they did! Our counters were full of vases with beautiful flowers! Then, the late Kim Smith, who lived upstairs from the store, gifted us with a beautiful painting of the store. Out front, we have two benches, which are gifts as well. Skip Krein gave them to us, and then Jimmy Woodin took "ownership" of them by fixing and painting them, and to this day, he continues to maintain them--including taking them inside every night and putting them back out every morning! Richard Miller from Richardson Hall helped Jimmy with the repair work. These are the types of people who live in Philmont, genuinely caring and wonderful people.

Oh, and there's more! We met Phyllis Muller on the day we opened on July 23, 2013. On our wedding anniversary, which is August 2nd, we hadn't even known her a month. But she showed up with the cutest gift: two ceramic frogs sitting on a metal bench! She is retired and said she needed something to do, so now she shops for us--at least 4 or 5 days a week! She buys what we need for the store, and more. If Nancy doesn't have a list ready, Phyllis gets upset. She absolutely must do this for us, she says. Also, Winnie and Skip Speed have been so generous and supportive from the start. Winnie used to do the dishes at the store daily; sometimes she still does! They knew the community needed this store and they did everything they could to help us make it happen. We can't measure the generosity of this community, and especially

these next two gentlemen: Bob Finkle, owner of Byron Parker Plumbing, and Paul Robertson, owner of Robertson Electric. On their evenings and days off, they helped complete the last legs of our dream of opening up this store, with no money up front. This is our Philmont community.

By Mike Myers



Co-owner Nancy Myers with a gift from Phyllis Muller