



Perry's Deli Named as the 2026 Middletown Days Pioneer Award Winner

By: MacKenzie Sheffer

For more than three decades, Perry's Deli has meant so much more than just a breakfast, lunch, and dinner stop. It has become a landmark of Middletown, symbolizing the community, hard work, and dedication that make this place so special. For the 2026 Middletown Days celebration, three generations of one family have been honored with this year's Pioneer Award.

This story dates back to 1992, when Hal Weber and his wife moved to Lake County after Hal retired from a 27-year career in Fairfax. The couple purchased property in the area, but Hal soon realized that retiring at the age of 59 left him with an itch to stay busy. That same year, he opened Perry's Deli in Middletown.

The Middletown of 1992 looked quite different from the town we recognize today. With fewer businesses and less development, Perry's Deli quickly stood out. The deli soon became a success, attracting both local residents and commuters traveling through Middletown, the gateway to Lake County.

In its early years, Hal dedicated his life to the business, working hours that are almost unheard of today. He opened at 5:00 a.m. sharp and closed at 11:00 p.m. every day, working seven days a week. His strong work ethic and dedication helped establish Perry's as a dependable and trusted business within the community.

With all the success surrounding the deli, one might assume someone would eventually buy the business. Fortunately, Hal had other plans. Perry's Deli has remained family-owned since the day it opened. After several years, Hal passed ownership to his son, Tim, who later passed it on to his own son, Derek. Keeping the business in the family has allowed it to maintain its original values while adapting to changing times.

Current owner Derek describes their success with humility. "When I think about it, they did all of the hard work," he says. "I've only been running it for the last several years. Perry's has become an institution because of what they built." He expresses gratitude for receiving this award, knowing the foundation was laid by his father and grandfather. That institution has served thousands of workers, residents, and visitors throughout the years. Raising the open sign before sunrise made Perry's a necessary stop for commuters heading to work. Customers from the 1990s still walk through those same doors today and continue to return. "We see the same people every day," the family explains. "Some of the same customers Grandpa served are the same people we serve now." All three generations agree that each has contributed to the deli's success in different ways, but they share the same commitment to serving their community. They believe one of Middletown's greatest strengths is its close-knit nature. In larger cities, many businesses never truly get to know their customers. In Middletown, however, long-lasting friendships are formed. Customers become more than just patrons—they become neighbors, friends, and members of the extended community.

"Everybody knows everybody," Derek says. "When something good or bad happens, the community comes together and supports each other." Over the years, the family has established deep roots throughout the town. Since Hal became part of the Middletown community in the early 1990s, the family has remained actively involved in local events and activities. They have supported local sports teams, participated in community events, and helped create new opportunities for residents. More recently, family members have contributed to designing welcoming gathering spaces and activities for local youth.

While there have been many successes throughout the deli's journey, there have also been significant challenges. Events such as the Valley Fire, power outages, COVID-19, and economic hardships tested both the business and the community. Through every obstacle, Perry's Deli remained open and ready to serve.

"It would have been easy to walk away," Derek reflects. "But that's not what this community does. We take things day by day and keep moving forward."

The family credits Hal's perseverance for helping keep the deli alive. From working before sunrise until 11:00 p.m. each night, his consistency and commitment became the foundation of the business. Those values have been passed down through each generation. The community recognizes Perry's dedication and appreciates every hour the family has invested over the years.

"It's a marathon, not a sprint," Derek remarks. "You can't fix every problem in one day. You just keep working and keep improving."

As Middletown celebrates the 65th anniversary of Middletown Days, Perry's Deli remains optimistic about the future. The family hopes to continue serving the community, supporting those around them, and creating opportunities for future generations. They also hope Middletown continues to preserve the small-town values and sense of community that make it such a special place to call home.

When asked about their proudest accomplishment over the years, the answer was simple but meaningful. "Perry's Deli is still here," Tim said. Coming from a business that has endured decades of change while remaining family-owned and community-focused, that simple statement speaks volumes. Those five words represent decades of hard work, perseverance, and dedication. As much as the family has served the people of Middletown, they remain humble and grateful.

The Pioneer Award recognizes not only the history of Perry's Deli, but also the incredible commitment, resilience, and community spirit that have made it a cornerstone of Middletown for more than thirty years and the spirit of the family that has helped shape Middletown.

We at Middletown Central Park Thank you Hal, Tim, Derek, and all those who have worked for this outstanding business, your hours have not gone unnoticed.