

# Home 'Freis'

## Long-standing Santa Clara Fixture Soon Back in Business

BY CAMI COX

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A local business more than 50 years old has taken a short vacation. Frei's Fruit Market, a Santa Clara establishment that has served Washington County residents and out-of-towners for many decades, was recently torn down. But loyal customers need not despair, as Frei's will soon be rebuilt and make its comeback to provide residents and visitors alike with homegrown produce and other local items.

"It (will have) a new look," Frei's Fruit Market co-owner Bryce Frei said, "(but) the service is going to be the same."

Frei and his sister Vicki Lasswell, who owns Uncle and Auntie's Gift Shop just down from Frei's Fruit Market, took over ownership of the market from parents Landon and Wanda Frei in 2006. Since the fruit stand was torn down for expansion

See **Home Freis**  
page A15



Photo courtesy of VICKI LASSWELL

Landon and Wanda Frei, lifelong Santa Clara residents, are the original owners of Frei's Fruit Market and still help run the business.

## Home Freis

Continued from page A1

a few months ago, Lasswell said she and her parents have gotten calls and visits almost daily from concerned customers who are afraid one of their favorite shopping spots is gone for good.

"I've had people come in my shop just about to tear their hair out because they thought (the fruit market) was gone," Vicki Lasswell said. "Pretty irate, some of them. ... We're having so many people upset, because the fruit stand's gone and they think we're done. So we just need to let people know that we're rebuilding."

They've also had a multitude of customers calling from Salt Lake, Mesquite and Las Vegas who weren't aware the stand had been demolished, wanting to know when Frei's would be opening for summer business.

"As soon as we get a few warm days back-to-back, people start calling and saying, 'When's your produce going to be ready?'" Bryce Frei said.

Frei's Fruit Market has certainly made a name for itself over the years, and loyal customers come back again and again to shop at the hometown market. Wanda Frei said local people rely on them for the fruit they preserve and bottle each year, and repeat customers from out of town stop regularly on their way through St. George to buy produce and other items.

Frei's Fruit Market has a rich history in Southern Utah. Original owners Landon and Wanda Frei were both born in Santa Clara, where they have resided their entire lives — 91 years each, to be exact.

"We've seen a few changes here," Wanda Frei said.

But for a long time, those changes haven't included the goings-on at Frei's Fruit Market. Once part of a long line of makeshift fruit stands along old Highway 91, Frei's has become the last stand standing, and

customers from all over the country have stopped off to purchase fresh fruit, vegetables, local honey, jams and jellies there over the years.

"We've had customers that have been coming (to Frei's Fruit Market)

Santa Clara city finance officer Wally Ritchie said. Making Santa Clara Drive more foot-traffic friendly will definitely be an asset to Frei's Fruit Market, Bryce Frei said.

The market is now being rebuilt in its former location at 2895 Santa Clara Dr. Currently, only a cement foundation exists there, but by June, the Freis anticipate the new facility will be up and running.

The new Frei's will feature the same basic layout that customers have enjoyed for decades, Bryce Frei said, but there will be some improvements, such as a new canopy covering the produce display, a larger building with

better traffic flow, and additional cash registers to more efficiently accommodate customers.

"We're definitely going to maintain the same quality produce from what we grow and what we bring in from northern Utah and Colorado," he said.

"I'm really excited about it. I think it's going to be really neat," he went on to say. "I think when people get used to (the changes), they'll like it. It's more workable and there will be more space."

Though some things at Frei's will be a little different when the market reopens, all in all, it will be the same place it's been for five decades. Dad Landon Frei still plants and harvests a great deal

of the produce sold there every year, and mom Wanda still knows many of her customers by name and will continue to wait on them and sell them their favorite fruits and veggies at the market.

"A family tradition continues," Landon Frei said. "We have the same friendly atmosphere, vine-ripened vegetables and fruit."

Once crops are harvested, the Freis said they may sell produce in front of Uncle and Auntie's Gift Shop until the new market is completed. To contact Frei's Fruit Market, call 435-673-3835. To contact Uncle and Auntie's Gift Shop, call 435-634-9416 or visit the store at 2865 Santa Clara Dr.

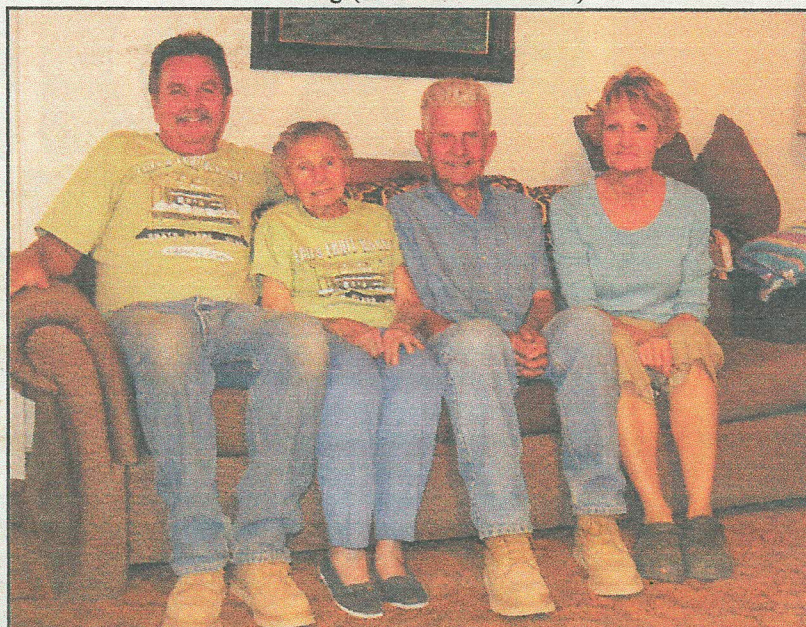


Photo by Cami COX

Bryce Frei, Wanda Frei, Landon Frei and Vicki Lasswell (left to right) are the owners and operators of Frei's Fruit Market in Santa Clara.

for more years than I can count," Bryce Frei said.

The recent demolition of the market coincided with the beginning of a streetscape construction project that currently has Santa Clara Drive torn up for improvements, but Bryce Frei said the construc-

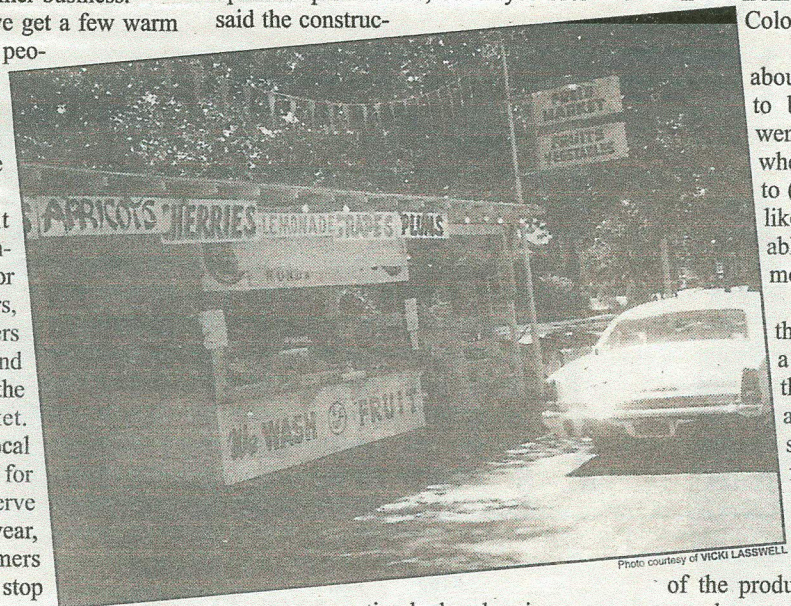


Photo courtesy of VICKI LASSWELL

tion had no bearing on the decision to tear the market down.

"The build was more out of necessity to fix some areas (of the market) and change some areas," he said.

"I think it was excellent timing to expand with the streetscape — I think it will make a nice fit. But we were going to expand, anyway."

The Santa Clara streetscape project will be making some changes to downtown Santa Clara, including re-pavement of Santa Clara Drive, installation of sidewalks and streetlights, and new landscaping to create "an inviting, walkable downtown,"