

> WORKING LIVES

Living and working together is a recipe for success for Trevor and Janice Whenlock, who run Plaistow's traditional family butcher shop.

With its old-fashioned wooden shutters and scrubbed white tiles, shopping at T & J Whenlock is like stepping back in time. But a reputation for top quality meat and service with a smile has helped the Barking Road shop survive against modern competition.

Customers come from as far afield as Lincolnshire to stock up on Trevor and Janice Whenlock's delicious homemade pies, sausages, matured beef and organic pork.

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There has been a butcher shop at 380 Barking Road for more than a century, and the Whenlocks are proud to continue the tradition. “It's one of the only shops remaining around here that look like this,” says Trevor. “A guy called George Pledge owned it in 1881, obviously this street's changed a lot since then, but we know everyone that comes through the door by name. It's a nice atmosphere and we try to keep it like that. We are thinking of getting an apprentice and if we get someone trained up over the next ten years they will have the chance to take over the shop one day.”

The Victorian shop has escaped modernisation and Trevor and his wife believe keeping it traditional is the key to their success: “Ten years ago we had five butchers just at this junction, now we're the only ones left. The shop is part of the appeal and we get to know most customers and what they want.

“We've got some customers who've been coming here for more than 30 years,” says Custom House-born Trevor, who was 16 when he started work at the shop in 1971 (when it was called Bobby Mace & Son).

“When people ask us how to cook something and what to have with it we

tell them. We give them the time and the recipes,” explains Janice. “I've always loved cooking and I wasn't brought up to make things from packets and tins. People are becoming more aware about the food they eat and my pies are very popular because I don't put any additives, preservatives or colouring in them.”

The couple bought the shop when the previous owner retired in 2000. Their 29 year-old daughter Carla, gave up a fashion career to join the family business. “She was worried about us and the long hours we work. She looks after us and our books,” says Trevor, who works seven days a week.

“This is an old trade. It's still labour-intensive and not very profitable. We start work between 5am and 6am to take deliveries and set the counters up. At the end of each day everything's scrubbed down, the fridges are cleaned and everything's put away. The hours are long so it's a good job we work together otherwise we wouldn't see one another!”

After more than 30 years in the business, Trevor is still passionate. “There's a lot to learn about meat, you can't just put it in the fridge and that's it. Here I hang the beef for at least three weeks, then you have to be able to tell when meat's ready. You have to be enthusiastic to do this job because it's hard work but I still get excited about it.”

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Janice adds: “We're dedicated and the customers come first.”

T & J Whenlock

380 Barking Road, E13 8HL
Open Tuesday to Saturday
020 7476 1261

Interested in becoming a butcher?

You do not need any academic qualifications and most people will start as a trainee or assistant butcher in a shop. To find out more, visit www.meattraining.org.uk or call the Meat Training Council on 01908 231062.





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