

Raes have that X Factor



At James Rae & Son in Polmont no one is in any doubt about who is in charge, it is Julie. The result is that you have a scrupulously clean shop that is run to the high standard set by her. The spotless premises must create a real challenge to enforcement officers since finding anything wrong is not easy when everything is brand new.

Julie is a trained Nursery Nurse but she worked in her father's shop from a young age and returned to the family business over 20 years ago. Seemingly assisted by an aversion to sleeping she is in the shop most mornings by 5.00am making sure everything is organised for her staff turning up and then for her customers.

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With her father and mother devoted to the business that they set up in July 1987 her introduction to the retail meat industry was unavoidable but with her father James about to celebrate his 65th birthday, Julie is keen to continue the success story. She enjoys being the boss and the exchanges with customers, many of whom she describes as friends. She said:-

"Before they used to say that they would wait and get my Dad to serve them, now they prefer me. The business is 25 years old this year and if I am lucky enough, I would like to take on another 25."

The prospects for that are good since this is a business in a good location, meeting local demands with service that is appreciated. Add to that the complete refurbishment of the premises last year then you have an ideal basis to go forward.

Everything did not look so rosy though on 12th June last year. At 4.00am that Sunday morning seven fire engines rushed to a fire at the adjacent Co-operative supermarket. Vandals had set fire to bins against a door at the rear of the premises and the fire had travelled along the eaves of the building. Smoke and water did considerable damage to the butchers. The Co-op was able to re-open the following week but for Raes it was over three months before they were up and running again on 23rd September.

More pictures at <https://picasaweb.google.com/SFMTA3/JAMESRAEPOLMONT#>



When they re-opened most of the stress and pain was removed and the result of the fire was that the butchers was completely refurbished. There is £2000 worth of new Baro lighting, new white walls, new black floor (both Altro) and a new Eurocryor Vela serve over cabinet all fitted by Watco. Fortunately a £82,000 insurance claim went a long way to cover the refit.

The customers appear to have missed their local butcher and returned in great numbers. Christmas trade was the best for the last five years and the mix of locally sourced meat, value packs, a great sausage trade, value added products, ready meals, own make pies, filled rolls and even hot drinks creates lots of sound reasons for shopping at James Rae and Son.



Beef is procured by Jim Dunn at Caledonian Mart in Stirling and augmented with cuts from John Scott Meats, Munros in Dingwall and Millers of Speyside. A 15 year long partnership with farmer Alan Ferguson has seen the shop's lamb comes from Gillandersland Farm, Muiravonside near Linlithgow. Both the lamb and beef are processed through the abattoir at Dunblane and the pork through John Scott Meats in Paisley.



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Since the fire almost all the manufacturing is carried out at Rae's Kincardine shop leaving Julie, Les and trainee Jack to concentrate purely on selling and serving. That's no bad thing since they can afford more time to greeting customers and meeting their needs.

James Rae has been in the meat business now for over 50 years. He gained tremendous experience when working at Hamiltons in Bannockburn, Blyths and Woolworths in Stirling, Central Fife Co-op and Falkirk Co-op before starting up on his own in Laurieston. Son Scott runs the Kincardine shop and Julie the Polmont shop.

Although James Rae is being encouraged to take things easier given his impending big birthday he is still there to instil enthusiasm into the business. The drive and commitment is certainly evident in his offspring who have used the experience of the fire to ignite their passion for the business.



At your service - left to right: James Rae, Julie, Les and Jack.