

The thousands of products stocked in Snyder Food Services' sprawling warehouse demonstrate just how much the Kendallville-based company has diversified and grown since its inception in 1970.

SNYDER FOOD SERVICES

Family Recipe for Growth and Reinvention

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Employees: 75
Resources: Jon Snyder, vice president; Mike Snyder, vice president

By Anthony Schoettle

In an era when many family-owned businesses struggle to survive beyond the second generation, Snyder Food Services has spent more than five decades proving that longevity is about much more than simply passing the torch.

What began as a small food-service operation in northeastern Indiana has evolved into a multifaceted company providing vending, micro market, coffee, water, catering and fresh-food solutions for businesses across Indiana – and beyond. Through changing consumer tastes, economic ups and downs, labor challenges and technological disruption, the Kendallville-based company has remained focused on a simple principle – take care of customers and employees like family.

That philosophy has helped Snyder Food Services grow from its founding in 1970 into a regional operation serving workplaces of all sizes while remaining firmly rooted in the community where it started. The company's footprint now spans throughout central and northeast Indiana as well as parts of Michigan and Ohio.

Today, the company is led by members of the Snyder family, with multiple generations involved in the business. While many family enterprises face difficult transitions between generations, the Snyders have embraced succession as an opportunity to blend tradition with innovation. The result is a company that honors its heritage while continuously adapting to changing workplace needs.

Snyder Food Services was founded by Jim and Shirley Snyder. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the couple's sons, Jeff and Terry, took over the firm – which has grown to 75 full-time employees with operations in Gas City that serve the southern part of its territory, in addition to the Kendallville headquarters.

Jeff's sons – Jon and Mike – now serve as vice presidents and run much of the day-to-day operations. Mike, 50, primarily handles finance and operations, while Jon, 46, oversees sales and customer retention. Jeff, who turns 71 in September, serves as CEO and his wife, Ann, is the company's secretary and treasurer. Terry is stepping back from the business but still serves as a part-time consultant. And Terry's son, Eric, 42, is vice president in charge of marketing and technology. Ownership of the firm resides solely with the Snyder family.

One of the keys to the company's success is not only how well the Snyder family gets along and works

together, but how they extend that familial feel and mutual respect to its customers and employees.

"We genuinely like each other and we like working together," Jon says. "We were taught from a very early age, if you treat your employees and customers like family – with that same respect and care – you'll go a long way."

Mike adds that no one at Snyder Food Services gets hung up on titles. "For many years, we just did whatever our dad told us to do – no questions asked," Mike states with a warm laugh.

The Snyders are clearly hands-on owners, and no task is below any of them. In fact, on the day of this interview, Jeff and Terry – now the elder statesmen of the firm – were out mowing grass at the company's expansive Kendallville headquarters. That shouldn't be any surprise, as their parents – Jim and Shirley – worked well into their 80s, with Jim mowing the grass – among handling other tasks – until he was 87 and Shirley answering phones and tending the front desk.

"We were taught never be afraid to get your hands dirty," Mike relates. "You do whatever it takes. No job is too big or too small for any of us."

Thriving through change

The business has changed dramatically since its early years. Traditional vending remains a component of the company's portfolio, but today's workplace food-service environment is far different from the one the founders entered decades ago.

Employees increasingly expect fresh food, healthier options and convenience. Employers, meanwhile, are looking for amenities that help attract and retain workers in a competitive labor market.

Recognizing those shifts, Snyder Food Services has expanded well beyond vending machines. One of its biggest growth areas has been micro markets – self-service workplace stores that allow employees to purchase fresh meals, snacks and beverages from open shelves, coolers and freezers using automated checkout technology.

Micro markets have gained in popularity because they give employees access to a wider variety of products than traditional vending machines while providing employers with an attractive workplace perk. For Snyder Food Services, the concept represents the intersection of convenience, technology and changing consumer expectations.

The company's investment in micro markets – starting in 2010 – reflects a broader commitment to staying ahead of industry trends rather than reacting to them.

That same mindset also drove the creation – in 1994 – of Hometown Foods, Snyder's fresh-food division. The operation produces more than 300 different products, including sandwiches, salads, desserts and prepared meals, each month from its production facility, allowing the company to offer fresher and healthier choices to customers. According to the company, the initiative was launched in response to growing demand for wellness-focused food offerings and a desire by employers to provide better options for workers.



"Being a family-owned and operated company, there's not a lot of layers of bureaucracy for us to go through to get things done. We're able to react, whether it's with technology or customer interests, a lot quicker than most of our larger competitors."

– Jon Snyder

The fresh-food business illustrates how workplace food service has evolved.

Years ago, employees grabbing a soda and candy bar from a vending machine might have represented the norm. Today, many workers are looking for protein-rich meals, fresh salads and grab-and-go options that support healthier lifestyles. Snyder Food Services has adapted by building a business model around changing preferences rather than clinging to old habits.

And more and more employers recognize that amenities such as fresh food, coffee programs and convenient workplace markets can play a role in employee satisfaction. Snyder Food Services has benefited from that trend by positioning itself not merely as a vendor but as a workplace solutions provider.

Coffee also remains a significant part of the company's identity.

Through its Full Cup Coffee brand, Snyder Food Services provides coffee, tea and beverage programs for workplaces throughout the region. The company describes the privately roasted coffee line as a premium offering designed to give customers a higher-quality experience while reinforcing the personalized service that has become a hallmark of the business.

Along the way, Snyder also has made a few key acquisitions that helped it expand its territory and offerings in important markets.

Pandemic punch

Keeping pace and maintaining growth hasn't always been easy. The company's revenue took a sizable hit shortly after the pandemic – with several of its customers shuttering temporarily or permanently. The move to hybrid and remote work schedules that resulted from that period have continued



Snyder Food Services' growing fresh-food business reflects the workplace food-service sector's evolution and increased focus on healthy options.

to be a challenge.

"We've had to come to grips with the fact that the workplace is different than it was (before COVID)," Mike offers. "We lost about 20% to 25% of our top-line sales due to COVID. Since then, we have grown back, recovered probably about 6% to 8% of that."

But the Snyder family had no intention of laying down. They did what they have for 50-plus years: think strategically and work hard. "The tradition of getting down to work and getting our hands dirty came in handy," Jon explains.

Since the pandemic began to loosen its grip in late 2022 and early 2023, the company has seen steady, sustainable growth and has begun to take back more of what it lost.

Tech savvy

Just because this is a family-owned company in small-town Indiana doesn't mean it isn't cutting edge.

"During COVID, we increased our technology and I would describe us as a highly technological company," Mike shares.

Snyder Food Services has implemented AI cameras with its micro markets as well as increased acceptance of credit card transactions at many of its operations. "Loyalty cards, too, are something we've implemented and have become a big component for us," Mike notes.

Yet despite the enhancements, company leaders point to relationships as the foundation of their success. The company promotes the idea that customers are not simply accounts on a spreadsheet but long-term partners. That approach extends to employees as well. Many have been with the firm for 30-plus years.

Part of that culture consists of community involvement.

"We donate goods and monetarily to a number of charities and community causes, primarily involving kids, schools and sports," Jon relays.

Mike adds: "Giving back is part of the value system we've been taught. We donate to numerous organizations, including the Noble County Police Department (fund), American Red Cross, Big Brothers and Big Sisters and ARC Dancing with the Stars – which benefits adults and children with special needs, among others. The biggest charitable thing we do is through our loyalty card: 1.5% of every transaction a person makes goes to the charity of the customer's choice. The United Way has been a big beneficiary, as well as Wounded Warrior and the Alzheimer's Association."

New generation

As workplaces continue to change and employee expectations continue to rise, Snyder Food Services appears positioned to keep doing what it has done for decades: serve customers, embrace innovation and prove that family-owned businesses can thrive across generations when they combine strong values with a willingness to reinvent themselves.

There appears to be a new generation at Snyder waiting in the wings. Mike and his wife, Gina, have two children: Brady, 15, and Layton, who soon will turn 13. Jon and his wife, Julie, have a son, Josiah, who turned 12 in August. Eric and his wife, Michele, have two children: Elliot, 14, and Reese, 12.

Jon sees a parallel dynamic in his personal and professional lives.

"Like raising children and tending to family, running a business takes a village," Jon notes. "It takes more than the people at the top. It takes the technicians, support staff, commissary workers, warehouse staff and drivers all pulling in one direction to make this company continue moving forward. And if one of the parts of the team falls apart, we all fall down. There's a real reliance on one another here. A real trust. That's made all the difference."

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