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RICHARD W. ROELLER/Buffalo News

Broadway Market Manager Joe Petruso offers a traditional butter lamb.

Lent gives aging market a taste of its glory days

THE 103-YEAR-OLD Broadway Market, the city's secular cupboard for its religious feasting, opens its Easter season next week with high expectations that its pierogis, duck soup, kielbasa and strudel will coax nearly \$4 million into the alms basins of its merchants.

"During Holy Week, customers will be walking shoulder to shoulder, 70,000 strong," predicted Joe Petruso, the sometimes-testy and sometimes-avuncular manager.

Last summer, he was testy because the Griffin administration had drafted a proposal to fire him. This week, he was avuncular because he and the mayor were planning to have lunch together.



Ray Hill

Broadway Market comes into season twice a year. It bustles in Lent for Easter, in Advent for Christmas.

The rest of the year, it sleeps. That is all at once both its weakness and its strength.

"Everybody knows it isn't Easter without a visit to Broadway Market," Petruso said.

Some former residents drive back to Buffalo to shop for Easter at the Broadway Market, he said. Some people mail its produce to families who have moved away.

This week, except for the flowers that come out in abundance on the stands during Holy Week, the market was set for the coming of the great holiday rush. But the aisles were near empty, and it was great for browsing.

Little by little, beginning next week, that will change, and today's few will become tomorrow's many.

Great rings of smoked and fresh sausage hung over the counters of Redlinski's, E. Piotrowski's, Petru Lupas', and Charlie the Butcher's, veteran merchants each with their own loyal clientele.

Meat cutters worked feverishly trimming the hams that have made the market somewhat famous.

In the card shop, one could buy an Easter greeting card in 13 languages. At the bakeries, one could buy a loaf of bread indigenous to 13 countries.

Like the telephone book says, "if it's out there, it's in here."

Therein also hung the aroma and tangy promise of fresh-ground horseradish, homemade sauerkraut and bulk pickles. And although they weren't plentiful, the first butter lambs made their appearance this week. And to generations of Buffalonians, that was a certain harbinger of Easter.

By Palm Sunday, Petruso and Larry Weilacher, the marketing manager, will begin the full-court press that catapults the old marketplace from a sleepy civic outpost to a starring role in a secular observance of a mighty resurrection.

For a full week, sometimes live and sometimes with film at noon, 6, and 11, local television stations will use the market and swarming crowds as backdrops for their newscasts and such local programs as Channel 7's "AM Buffalo."

Sometimes Irv himself, Bob and Carol, and others have broadcast direct from the Broadway Market. They are expected back this year, along with their colleagues who do weather and funny Bozo acts.

Weilacher believes people aren't shopping early because they enjoy the crowds. Petruso says, "The people like Channel 7," and they put off shopping until Tom Jolls arrives on the scene.

"In the old days," says Weilacher, the marketing manager, "the entertainment was provided by Sattler's 998 store, across the street."

He worked at Sattler's then, and as far as he's concerned, those were the "glory days" of the Broadway Market. It was a time when Sattler's never stopped its hoopla, and the market moved to its constant beat.

That's the hope of 69-year-old Joe Petruso, the market manager, who says those good old days might well return with the planned construction of a K mart store on the old Sattler site. With the administration breathing down his neck and wanting something more than two big shopping weeks a year at the market, Petruso still could be in deep trouble.

While Petruso tells his critics that he keeps the premises neat, tidy, and painted, there's a school of thought that says the Broadway Market needs a touch of "oomph" and that it pales in comparison with such markets as Toronto's Kensington, Cleveland's West Side Market and the French Market in Columbus, Ohio.

They say that after 103 years, some of its novelty has worn off.