

## Marion's Bi-Rite: Hometown butcher serves southside

BY SHANNON WATKINS  
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**T**here are two things it's hard to get Ernest Marion of Marion's Bi-Rite Butcher Shop in Farmville to do in an interview: smile and stop working.

Marion labors diligently every day ordering, cutting and packaging meats and selling them to a steady stream of customers and doesn't like to stop for the media (but he will, because he's also polite).

As for smiling, that's what his customers do.

"If I don't get it from Costco, it comes from here," Jane Ghee said, looking through the steak selection. "They have the best meats." She emphasized the word "best." Ghee said she's shopped at Marion's since the store was in Cumberland.

"I love their steaks, New York strip, I love it," Ghee said. "I love their hamburger packs. It's about the only place I've been able to find turkey wings. (Bi-Rite also has turkey necks; those are the only prepackaged fresh meats they carry.) And they always have such a nice assortment of meats. I love their pork chops, I like their bacon. I pretty much do my meats here."

Ardell Reed, soft-spoken, simply said, "Yes," when asked if she shopped a lot at Marion's as she went through the checkout counter with four bags of assorted cuts.

Marion's Bi-Rite is a Farmville institution, selling primarily beef, pork and chicken in various cuts and chops, but you can special-order almost anything you like and he'll fulfill it for you. "Yeah, we're trying to order what they want," Marion said.

The shop operated in Cumberland from May 1997 but moved to its current location in May 2011. Among its handful of employees, some have been there for almost the entire run.

"Nobody cuts meat anymore," Marion said of why he opened a butcher shop. He started as a full grocery store in Cumberland, but a Dollar General opened up nearby. "The grocery part didn't do well, so I just closed up and decided to just go to a butcher shop," he said. "I had a full line of groceries, but I decided I wasn't going to compete with Dollar General."

Moving strictly to meat and its accompaniments seemed to work well for Marion, who's



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Longtime employee, Freda Langhorne, works next to Ernest Marion.

been going strong ever since.

He learned butchering the old-fashioned way. "I was raised on a farm," Marion said. "We slaughtered our own hogs and had our own smokehouse, so I'm pretty familiar with cutting it up anyway."

He gets his products from several distributors based on what's available. If one is out of a certain kind of meat, he can go to another. They come in whole chickens and large pieces of meat. He and his employees cut them down into smaller pieces for sale. "You never see hanging beef anymore," Marion said, referring to whole sides of beef that used to be the norm.

The meat is fresh and looks it, laid on white foam trays and gleaming under taut plastic wrap. Whole chickens and separate pieces, pork rib racks and thick chops, New York strip steaks and generous ribeyes, ground meats

of all varieties — these, plus other products that change from day to day, make it very hard to leave empty handed. And it's almost impossible to not want to haul out the grill, no matter how hot or cold the weather, and turn it all into something delicious.

You don't even have to leave Marion's to gather the ingredients; Bi-Rite has lots of extras, like onions and potatoes, seasoning mixes and breading, sauces and condiments, a freezer full of side dishes and desserts along with various seafoods, another refrigerated case with processed meats like hot dogs, bacon and bologna. That's not even a comprehensive list and leaves out the array of breads and buns. Not to mention bones for dog treats, pig ears and beef liver and other products.

There's also a shelf of one-pound plastic bowls packed with chicken, pasta,

macaroni and potato salads as well as coleslaw. These are particular customer favorites, Marion said, and are made fresh in the store.

On two separate visits, the customers varied widely but all seemed to be in an eager mood: a smiling gentleman with what sounded like a heavy German accent popping by to ask about ordering several pounds of sliced ham; a tall gentleman elegantly attired in striped green, gold and cream robes and matching kufi hat, intently perused the beef section; several women clustered around the deli window and asked about prices and joked with the employees.

"Yeah, we're trying to order what they want," Marion said. Bi-Rite sticks mostly to beef, pork and chicken, but if you want a case of lamb or something exotic, ask. If Marion can order it for you, he will.

What's his favorite part? "Just knowing the customers, I guess," Marion said. "I've got customers who have been with me for the whole time."

Perhaps one reason they've stuck around is the fact that while the meat-cutting area is separate in the back, everyone can see what's going on through a window in the wall above the poultry case.

"They can watch us work right there and can see what we're doing," Marion said. "That's why I put that window up. They can actually stand here and see what we're doing."

Through it, customers saw Manuel Caban slicing up a slab of pork. Caban has worked off and on for Marion's since 2000 when the

shop was in Cumberland and is now full-time.

"I like it. I love what I do. I'm a people person. I like to make it happen. I like to give everybody a good experience when they shop. Put a smile on somebody's face, that's priceless, you know?"

Delois Taylor, who's been with Marion's about the same amount of time — "25, 26 years, something like that," she said — neatly wrapped up chicken before taking stacks of trays out to the sales floor.

"I love it here," Taylor said.

What's her favorite part of the job? "Working with me!" Caban said, laughing as he headed for the walk-in refrigerator. Taylor laughed, too.

"I guess doing chicken," she said before diving back into it. If there was a longer answer to the question, it went unspoken. Marion's employees, like the Marion himself, stayed busy.

Marion's Bi-Rite doesn't offer the kind of expensive artisanal experience you'd expect at a hipster hangout; it's just your unpretentious, friendly neighborhood butcher shop with quality products. "We don't have anything labeled grass-fed beef," Marion said. "It's just USDA Choice."

Marion's business philosophy is as simple as a freshly cut steak.

"There's nothing I sell here that I wouldn't take home to my family," he said, and then, with a courteous goodbye, went back to work.

Marion's Bi-Rite is located at 1306 N. Main St., in Farmville. Hours of operation are 9 a.m. - 7 p.m. Monday-Saturday. For more information or to inquire about special order, call (434) 391-9999. The business can also be found on Facebook at facebook.com/Marions-Bi-Rite-1550943908469127.



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Manuel Caban, a full-time meat cutter for Marion's, is seen here handling a generous portion of crab legs.



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Delois Taylor, a longtime Marion's employee, stocks the poultry.

## 'Honor the King'

DEVOTIONAL

**T**he authority structure in America is in disarray, how are we to respond to the growing disrespect towards governing officials? In 1 Peter 2:17 we see a distinct relationship difference among people and God. "Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king." And in 2:13, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as to the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him..." What does honor look like when a biblical world view is disregarded by a king, and replaced by humanism? These scriptures were written under the iron grip of Rome, with the wicked Emperor Nero at the helm. The position of authority needs to be honored, even when we are deeply divided in our political or moral views. If we continue to disrespect authority, we will train another generation to do the same, each person doing what seems right in their own eyes.

In 1 Timothy 2, we see that the involvement of Christians in the lives of govern-

ing officials can make a big difference in the spiritual climate of the culture. It is much easier to honor the king when the king honors God, but what should our response be when government reaches beyond its biblical responsibilities of keeping order and punishing evildoers, and begins to enforce things that undermine the constitution of the country, or greater still, the authority of scripture? According to 1 Timothy 2:4, God's greatest desire is for people to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth regarding the eternal condition of the soul. This supersedes our comfort or financial success. 1 Tim 2:8, "Therefore, I want men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension." In a world where wrath and dissension has become the norm, God desires us to live a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. May the Holy Spirit renew our hearts and minds

to walk this path, the high road of God's calling and election!

This country has been established as a democracy, where each citizen 18 or older can be involved in government by voting, running for office, volunteering your time, and praying. The grass roots that feed a healthy democracy is the integrity of the people. If we the people are in moral decay, we must share some of the responsibility of failed leadership. Let's start by repenting of our own failures, honor our parents, encourage our leaders to follow God's Word, and teach our children to honor the people in authority. The truth should always be boldly stated, even when disregarded, but consider how we can disagree in honor. In the mercy of God, He may once again raise up a leader with integrity and godly morality, will anyone be prepared to follow?

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