

Rates are down, and the market's heating up

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Cookies that can't be beat



Lisa Wickey manages dough for what will eventually be oatmeal raisin cookies at Yoder's Baking Company in Centreville.
JEF RIESTMA/SPECIAL TO STURGIS JOURNAL

Jef Rietsma
Special to Sturgis Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

CENTREVILLE, MI – Consumers in more than two dozen states are starting to appreciate something St. Joseph County residents have known for the past two decades: Yoder's Country Market makes cookies that can't be beat.

The completion earlier this year of a new production area, coupled with a distribution network that takes made-in-Centreville treats to every state east of the Mississippi River and a handful to the west, have resulted in Yoder's earning national recognition for its cookies

and a few other bakery items.

Owner Jon Yoder admits he never imagined when he opened the country market 20 years ago, its cookies would hold a place of such prominence beyond St. Joseph County.

"I know we have a good product, it sells well, people buy it once and they like it, so they buy it a second time," Yoder said. "By that point, in most cases, we'll have a customer for life."

The increased exposure of Yoder's cookies started out of necessity, he said. It goes back to 2014, when he purchased the building behind the market.

Yoder said he anticipated the eventual need for the additional 14,000 square

feet for production, so acquiring the adjacent building made sense. But, he added, it also presented an unexpected quandary.

"What I didn't realize was adding 14,000 square feet to the same retail space would create a problem because we had this increased overhead but couldn't really change anything to bring more customers through the front door ... you can't grow your market by 30% on a local level (to help offset the expense of acquiring the new building)," Yoder said. "So, we had to look for a new market, we had to

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Big boost seen in pre-K enrollment

Beki San Martin
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

State officials say 51,000 4-year-olds have enrolled in Michigan's Great Start for Readiness Program for the 2025-26 school year as of October, a nearly 21% increase from last year's number.

State early education leaders announced the pre-K numbers at a news conference on Tuesday Nov. 18, held at St. George Preschool in Flint. It's an increase of about 9,000 more kids than were enrolled this time last year, said Beverly Walker-Griffiea, director of MiLEAP, the state agency overseeing early childhood education.

The increased participation marks a boost in enrollment for the state-funded program that offers free pre-K to all 4-year-olds in the state and continued progress toward Michigan's goal of eventually reaching 75% enrollment by 2027.

Officials said increased enrollment has come as a result of more families becoming aware of their eligibility for the program through a robust public awareness campaign over the last year.

"We've surpassed last year's enrollment numbers so we know we're making progress," said Emily Laidlaw, deputy director of MiLEAP. "There are no income restrictions, it's not just for low-income families or middle-income families but everyone. It means every family can go to work knowing their kid is safe and learning."

Since the program became universally available to all 4-year-olds, the

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