

Turning the kill into a meal



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Brad Wenger, owner of Wenger Meats and Ice in Carlisle.

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Hours after Wenger Meats & Ice in Carlisle closed its doors one day late last week, Brad Wenger remained in the shop to prepare.

Wenger had plenty of time to do to be ready for the beginning of rifle deer season in south-central Pennsylvania on Monday. It's one of the busiest times of the year for the butcher as many of the area's successful hunters search for places to take their kill.

His establishment is just one option for hunters. Others, including Deimler Deer Processing & Butcher Shop in Enola and Stitely's Meat and Deer Processing in Chambersburg, also provide hunters with a place to turn their kill into a wide variety of steaks, bologna, jerky and

hamburger.

But to provide hunters with the best possible product, the hunter must bring in an animal that has been properly cared for.

"There are hunters out there that are really misinformed about what they should do with the animal," Wenger said. "Consequently, they bring it [the deer] to us and it is dirty or not field dressed properly."

Keeping the animal from spoiling also is vital. Wenger said the hunter has a 5- to 7-hour window in 50-degree weather to get the meat into refrigeration.

"The animal's body heat can cool off very quickly if the animal is field dressed properly," Wenger said. "And this time of year, the days can get pretty chilly. It gets down into the 30s or 40s

and that helps the time that the hunter has to get the animal to us."

But that doesn't mean Wenger won't see animals brought in that have not been properly cared for.

"There are bad-case scenarios each year where the hunter simply leaves the deer in the woods too long," Wenger said. "There's nothing we can do if that's the case. If we wouldn't eat it, then I'm not going to cut it for you to eat."

If that isn't possible, then the animal must be packed with ice to preserve the meat until it can be properly processed.

"If the animal is well cared for, the meat is delicious," Wenger said. "It really is."

And he should know. After all, the long-time business owner has spent nearly four

decades creating delectable products. It is his passion, though some may not understand why.

"It seems like it is just blood and guts, and who would want to do that?" Wenger said as he walked past the empty meat hangers in his store's freezer.

"But really, it is a people business in a sense because you relate to the guys and hear their stories of how they got the animal.

"Often there is some sort of catch to the shot that they had or the size of the animal or the one that got away, so you always have those things to talk about."

Through the course of the two-week deer season, which ends Dec. 11, he'll have more than 400 stories to listen to.

He wouldn't have it any other way.