

Penn State football kicks \$59M into region

Teen baker sells \$2K in cookies

By Rick Dandes

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While operating David's Awesome Cookies, 15-year-old David Beiler takes a nibble from the \$59 million economic impact Penn State football has on Central Pennsylvania.

MIFFLINBURG -- The economic effect of Penn State football games can be felt 40 miles away from Beaver Stadium, where a western Union County teenager capitalizes on sweet-toothed Route 45 motorists heading to University Park on Saturdays

On weekends when the Nittany Lions play at home — such as this one, when No. 15 Ohio State visits No. 11 Penn State at 3:30 p.m. today — David will sell 350 dozen cookies from the front porch of his home on Route 45 west of Mifflinburg.

At \$5 a dozen, David will rake in about \$1,750.

David opens for business at 3:30 p.m. Fridays, after he finishes school, and begins his Saturday at 5:30 a.m. when the Nittany Lions are at home at 108,000-seat Beaver Stadium.

"We see a lot of cars on the road that day," he said. "More than normal. We get pretty busy."

On Thursday nights, the Beiler household bakes up to 4,000 cookies in a makeshift home bakery built by David's father, Samuel.

Some travelers en route to the game will order ahead and pick up boxes of cookies on the way to tailgating, Samuel Beiler said.

“A few weeks ago, we had a York customer pick up 20 dozen cookies on his way to the game,” David Beiler added.

David closes his cookie business when the football team finishes its home schedule. Eight of Penn State’s 12 regular-season games this fall will be played at Beaver Stadium.

“We’ll pick up again in April,” David said of Penn State’s spring Blue-White intrasquad game.

Penn State football also means big business for taverns, hotels and restaurants in the Valley.

When the Nittany Lions play at Beaver Stadium, “People who tailgate, and who want to avoid using I-80, will use our roads, stop for food in the morning and on the way back home eat in our restaurants and fast food outlets,” said Andrew Miller, executive director of the Susquehanna River Valley Visitor’s Bureau.

The bump in business for those ventures averages about 15 percent, Miller said.

Carolyn Zimmerman, owner of Shade Mountain Winery, said she notices about a 10 to 15 percent increase on home-game weekends

The winery is located on Route 104 between Middleburg and Mifflinburg, a road often used to get to Route 45 and State College.

“We have regular customers, but we also pick up a number of new customers just driving by on game day weekends,” Zimmerman said, “These are people who prefer wine to beer when tailgating.”

Mary Gajda, owner-manager of Victoria House, in Lewisburg, also notices a surge in business when Penn State plays at home.

“We have a large group of Penn State alumni here in Lewisburg, which is a spillover community for State College,” Gajda said. “When there is a home game, many of them will stop off before tailgating and buy food. We’re only an hour away from State College, right on Route 45. On the way back, they’ll stop for something to eat. When there is an away game, those alumni who don’t travel with the team will come together here and watch the game on TV. So we do well either way.”

The greatest economic impact in the region, however, is felt in State College, which becomes the third largest city in Pennsylvania on game day.

“There is a lot of excitement this week about one of our biggest rivals, Ohio State, coming into town,” said Betsey Howell, executive director of Centre County Visitors Bureau and Convention Center.

“But the truth is, no matter who we are playing, businesses from Centre County and surrounding counties are all winners when the team is at home. And I’m not just talking just about lodging. Restaurants, supermarkets, roadside stands, they all benefit from fans coming into State College from all directions.”

Tom Palchak, manager of the Creamery in State College, said that the University Park-based business will typically sell nearly 4,000 ice cream cones, 500 milkshakes and more than 3,000 half-gallons of ice cream on a football weekend.

He declined to say exactly how much money the Creamery makes on a football weekend.

“That’s a figure the university prefers that I not disclose,” he said.

If there is a noon or 3:30 p.m. kickoff, the Creamery does better than when the game is scheduled at 8 p.m., Polchak said.

Ice cream sales are depend on weather conditions, he said.

“If the weather is bad, rain or snow, then obviously, sales suffer,” Polchak said.

What he sells is not dependent upon the opponent, Polchak said.

“People think we do better with an Ohio State than with a smaller school, like a Coastal Carolina,” he said. “Whether it’s Ohio State, a major rival, or a smaller school like Coastal Carolina, there is no big difference in sales. Ours are pretty steady. In fact, when we play smaller schools earlier in the season, and it’s warmer outside, we do better. That’s not surprising, given that our product is ice cream.”