



# PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

## April 2020 NEWSLETTER

Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History

492 Main St., Portland, CT 06480 Tel: 860-342-5455

www.PortlandHistSoc.com Email: PortlandHistSoc@yahoo.com

Vol. 46 No. 1

### THE 24th ANNUAL TOWN-WIDE TAG SALES DAY

We are sorry to announce that the *24th Annual Town-Wide Tag Sales Day* is cancelled due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. This event is always our largest fundraiser of the year, our greatest community involvement, and an important part of our yearly budget, so it is with much sadness and some trepidation that we made this decision. We look forward to being back in 2021 for our Annual Town-Wide Tag Sales Day!

**All gifts – no matter the size – are truly meaningful and make a real difference in helping us preserve the past for the future!** (see page 2 and enclosed envelope for membership/donation information)

**Heartfelt thanks and best wishes to all during this difficult time.**

*This article is in a series on local businesses to inform all on the variety of Businesses and the People that own and operate them who are an integral part of the fabric of our Portland Community.*

### GOTTA'S FARM

by *George M. Gilbert III*

While at the Gasket Goons Car Show at Brownstone Park, I was fortunate enough to win a \$25.00 gift certificate to Gotta's Farm. Since Gotta's Farm is my family's go-to place for fresh produce during the summer, a gift certificate from Gotta's will be put to good use. It will surely create several garden-fresh healthy meals for Carol and me. I again started thinking about the generosity of the businesses in our Portland Community. The Gasket Goons were donating the proceeds of their raffle to the Portland Food Bank. The circle of giving creates goodwill and benefits many people in our Community. This spurred me to pay a visit to Richard "Dick" Gotta for an interview to learn more about his business so I could write this column. When I went to visit in October, Dick was

extremely busy and his wife, Jackie, thought it would be a good thing for me to contact him in a few months when his schedule slowed down a bit.

The day I chose to visit was a cold sunny day in mid-February. Surely it would not be a busy time of year since the farm stands were closed and there were no crops in the fields. How wrong I was! I met with Dick and he let me know that by January 10<sup>th</sup>, he has over 10,000 square feet of seedlings for hanging baskets started in his 35,000 square feet of heated greenhouses. The soil must be specially prepared by adding pre-mix soil with special nutrients specific to what is being grown. During the growth mode, the plants require constant attention. At the time I was there, Dick was in the process of starting the peppers, eggplant and other vegetables. He explained that he sells some plants to the public at the stands. A large amount of the plants he grows on his property go for his own

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*The Gotta family in one of their greenhouses.  
(L-R) Richard "Dick" Gotta, Elizabeth Gotta, RJ Gotta and Jackie Gotta.  
Running a successful family business requires that everyone is a contributor. This family has the magic ingredient.*

*Did you know that Giving Tuesday is on May 5th? The global threat of COVID-19 has hit communities around the world and increased the need for philanthropic action. In 2019, Giving Tuesday raised nearly \$2 billion and has been an essential day for organizations to reach their goals while helping communities in need. During this uniquely strange time of distancing ourselves, we can come together around common interests and show our appreciation for things that matter to us. **If the Portland Historical Society is an organization you value, please consider joining as a member. If you are a lapsed member, we welcome you back with open arms.***

## **Members and Donors to the Portland Historical Society – Thank you for your support!**

Membership supports our activities collecting, preserving and sharing Portland's history. Please check the member list below to see if your membership is current. Annual dues: Senior or Student \$10, Individual \$15, Family \$25, Business \$50, Patron \$100, Life \$400. More information is available at [www.PortlandHistSoc.org](http://www.PortlandHistSoc.org) or contact us at [PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com](mailto:PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com) or 860-335-8581. Interested in more involvement? Become a volunteer - contact us!

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***Gotta Farm's Route 17 farm stand.***

***This is the facility that houses the cider press, refrigeration, and sales of flowers, plants, fruits and vegetables.***

***Diversification is a key component to be successful in the farm business.***

*(Gotta's Farm - Continued from page 1)*

crop use and additionally, plants are taken to the various farmers markets for resale. There are other farm stands that sell fresh produce that they pick up from Gotta's Farm daily during the growing season. Dick has 120 acres where he grows fruit, vegetables, and flowers. He utilizes Integrated Pest Management (IPM) thereby minimizing pesticide use for all their crops. *(IPM is an ecosystem-based strategy that focuses on long-term prevention of pests or their damage through a combination of techniques such as biological control, habitat manipulation, modification of cultural practices, and use of resistant varieties.- UC)*

Gotta's Farm is a true multi-generational family farm with the whole family involved in the business. Jackie oversees the two retail stands, the original one on Route 17 and Q-P Market on Route 66. When asked, Dick explained to me that QP stands for Quick Pick Quality Produce. He mentioned that people today are buying just what they need for their planned meals and do not purchase any more than their immediate needs. Gotta's customers are buying small amounts of produce more frequently. His roadside stands allows his customers to stop, pick up what they need and be back on the road within minutes. Along with retail management, Jackie's other responsibility include taking care of the financial books for the farm, over-

seeing the farmers markets they participate in, and of course being a wife and mother to their two children, Elizabeth and RJ. Jackie and Dick's son, RJ, is graduating from Vinal Technical School in Middletown this year. He maintains all the equipment including the trucks, twelve farm tractors and other implements that are used daily for working the fields. RJ is also in charge of all the soil tillage - plowing, harrowing and cultivating - to prepare the many acres of soil for growing. During my visit, RJ was diligently working on one of the diesel farm trucks. Dick and Jackie's daughter, Elizabeth, is in the agri-



***Gotta's Farm's Q-P Market on Portland Cobalt Road***

culture program at UCONN studying Plant Science. Elizabeth helps on the farm when not studying in college. In addition to family, the Farm employs eight seasonal field workers and local students that work part-time at the retail outlets.

Dick is the "Grower" since assuming farm responsibilities from his father, Robert, and mother, Helen, in 1973. He manages growing over one hundred twenty acres including fifty-five acres of sweet corn along with acreage of flowers, strawberries, peppers, eggplant, tomatoes, many varieties of squash, cucumbers, melons, several varieties of lettuce, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, pumpkins, root vegetables and much more. Another important crop for the Farm is what Dick's great grandparents started in 1898. His great-grandfather, John, and great-grandmother,



***Hanging plant anyone? A small section of Gotta Farm's 35,000 square feet of greenhouse space.***

*(Continued on page 4)*



*Dick Gotta with his John Deere at their maintenance shop for service. Gotta's Farm has a full maintenance facility to service their many tractors, attachments, and implements throughout the year. Dick and Jackie's son, RJ, has the responsibility of seeing that all equipment is ready to go when needed. A farmer, besides being an engineer, electrician, plumber, botanist, and chemist, must also be an expert mechanic.*

**NEWSLETTER** - Editor: Claire Frisbie, 4/20/2020  
 PortlandCTHistory@gmail.com 860-335-8581  
 Printing by DEL Printing, LLC, 42 Gospel Lane,  
 Portland, CT - 860-342-2959

*(Gotta's Farm - Continued from page 3)*

Joanna, started growing fruit soon after purchasing the farm. They were Italian immigrants from Fubine, Italy. After buying their Portland property for agriculture, they started planting peaches and Japanese plum trees since it was only two years from planting to harvesting the first crop. Apples can take up to six or seven years. Within several years, they had an orchard including several varieties of apples and pears added to the peaches and plums with which they started. In addition to the fruit, John and Johanna also grew tobacco on the farm.

Gotta's has an operating cider press and has been pressing apples since the 1950's. This provides the market with delicious pure fresh apple cider in the Fall. It is sold to the public at their farm stands in addition to some local vineyards that use the cider to make apple wine.

Farming takes a lot of perseverance and creative ingenuity to grow healthy crops year after year. There is much to manage, and much that can go wrong if plant viruses, weather and other environmental conditions do not cooperate. The Gotta family, through hard work and intelligent management, has found the magic formula to keep this wonderful resource in our town continuing for future generations.



**April 2020 Newsletter!**

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