

## Rock Garden Farms going strong on Airport Road

By Bill Rea

Rock Garden Farms has been operating on Airport Road, north of Caledon East, for going on 30 years.

But its roots as a family operation, dedicated to customer service, goes back longer than that.

The 88-acre farm is owned by Nick and Tish Iuglio, but it's their daughter, Margaret Galati, who manages the operation, making it a true family business. She said her three sons pitch in, along with nine full-time employees and about 20 part-timers

"It's a team effort over here," she said.

"It's a honour to bring employment to the local area," she added.

The farm has become a destination for some; a place to stop for people heading up to the cottage or coming home.

"We're definitely known as a place to stop," Galati observed. "Treat the people right, give them what they like and they'll come back."

People bring their families from out of town go through the farm. Galati said they see it as representing a look at Ontario in all its glory.

A wide variety of the merchandise is produced on the site, including strawberries, corn, squash, pumpkins, herbs, etc.

"We have our own garden centre," Galati said, adding they do arrangements for things like patio pots, hanging baskets, etc.

She said her parents bought the property in 1988, and one of the first tasks was clearing the assortment of rocks scattered around the site.

"I think we're going to be growing rocks," she recalled her father saying. "There's rocks all over."

That's how the name Rock Garden Farms came to be.

The actual retail operation came about almost by accident, Galati recalled.

The family had been operating Tullamor Farmer's Market for a number of years, with the farm supplying produce there. One year, they had some extra corn, so Galati said her parents decided to sell some of it at the end of the driveway. Within a year, they had developed a following. Then they started a pick-your-own outlet for strawberries. They eventually offered more local produce as people asked for it.

"We slowly built up a clientele," she said. "It slowly evolved into what we have today."

Galati has been managing the business full-time since 1995.

Rock Garden operates from April until November. That's required, since it's regarded as an agricultural and not a commercial operation. Galati admitted she would like to stay open longer and keep things running.

"We're honoured to do what we do," she said.

Galati said her father came from a farm background in Italy, and always worked in the food industry.

He operated the store in Tullamore for 20 years, until the lease there expired.

"It was very good, right until the end," she said.

"That's always been his love," she added. "To bring quality to the community."

Galati said enjoying what you do is an important part of success.

"We're all blessed to love what we do," she said.

"I believe it was always quality first," Galati added. "It was quality service that was our get-go."

What does the future hold for Rock Garden Farms?

Galati said they plan to continue to be of service to the community, adding she hopes the next generation will come to enjoy it too.

"We hope to be here for many years to come," she declared, although a lot depends on the next generation being interested.

Galati agreed it's not always easy.

"It's a seven-day-a-week job," she observed. "You need to be committed."



The family operation at Rock Garden Farms includes Nick Iuglio, Anthony Galati, Tish Iuglio and Stefano, Paul, Margaret and Michael Galati.