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Celebrating 45 Years with El Vista Orchards

By: Andrea Scroggs

GREENCASTLE, PA – OCTOBER 10, 2022 --- In November, we will be celebrating a big anniversary with our first ever grower, El Vista Orchards. At Keystone, we pride ourselves on our relationships, and our partnership with El Vista is a wonderful testament to that. In celebration of that flourishing partnership, I had the pleasure of speaking with both Dave Benner and Bob Evans for this piece.

El Vista Orchards was started in 1915 by Dave Benner's grandfather, Banks Elmer Benner (aka, B.E. Benner). Dave is proudly third generation and his two sons, Kyle and David, are fourth generation. If you ask Dave how he got into the apple business, he'll tell you that he was born into it and there was never really any other way for him. He received his first official check from the farm at just ten years old and hasn't looked back since.

Marvin Carbaugh and Bob Evans officially formed Keystone in November of 1977. They were familiar with El Vista, run by Dave's father, Lloyd Benner, at the time. The two partners knew that El Vista provided quality apples, and envisioned them to be an excellent grower partner for Keystone. Bob Evans says, "They were significant, especially in the beginning, to our success. And they have been ever since." The first apple order we received was filled by El Vista and they are still an integral part of Keystone's apple program today.

Both Bob Evans and Dave Benner have fond memories and interesting stories to tell about each other from the last several years. The produce business isn't always easy, but these two companies have managed to thrive and evolve together, and to do it with humor and joy.

In fact, when speaking to Bob and Dave for this piece, they both recounted the same story. When Bob and Marvin called to ask if they could fill Keystone's first apple order, Lloyd Benner responded, "You got any money?" While it was probably part jest but mostly truth at the time, both parties remember this moment now with fondness and a chuckle. El Vista quickly learned that Keystone was good for it - not just the money, but also a long lasting connection. And Keystone quickly realized this was a grower they would be partnering with well into the future.

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Regarding the Keystone team, Dave says everyone he has ever worked with at Keystone handles themselves with professionalism and integrity. He talks about a partnership that has worked well for both sides over decades, saying, “We’ve always kept each other straight.”

Everyone at Keystone speaks highly of Dave and his team at El Vista as well. Bob Evans summarized it best — “They’re a good grower; and they’re great, hard working people to work with. The main thing has been communication and also understanding. Most days were not smooth, but we were able to work things out and make them work for everyone involved. They worked very hard for us in the beginning, and still do today.” Apple commodity manager, Lisa Fetterhoff, added that “no is not in El Vista’s vocabulary. They will always do whatever it takes to fulfill our customers’ needs.”

When asked about his secret to success in the apple business and in life, Dave says it’s about having heart and taking it one day at a time. “You have to have a big heart. You have to take it one day at a time, knowing they’re all different. Give your best every day and at the end of it, know that you did what you could and you gave it your all, no matter the outcome.”

From all of us at Keystone... Thank you for an incredible 45 years of working together, and cheers to another 45.

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