

Tourtellot & Co.

Producing A Legacy Through Produce

110 years ago, Tourtellot Produce was a family company supplying the freshest produce to retailers in the Providence, RI area. Today, Tourtellot & Co. is still family-run and is thriving by buying and selling produce from a five-acre site in a suburb of Providence.

According to Andrew Sigal, president of Tourtellot, the company has done a good job at adapting to changes in the industry. He insists that his company hasn't been tremendously more clever than its competition, but they've succeeded because of hard work and desire.

"Our ability to thrive is based on our desire to source out the very best produce, keep it fresh and help our customers feel the excitement...the color and texture that produce is all about," says Sigal.

This excitement is the cornerstone of the company's business philosophy. While other suppliers may deal in numbers, Sigal and Tourtellot deal in the enthusiasm that he calls the "blood of the market."

Tourtellot's goal is to nurture an enthusiasm for fresh produce. Making produce a fun experience goes back to the marketplaces that have been around forever. In the markets that Sigal refers to, the sights and smells delighted your senses and created excitement.

The bright colors and tantalizing smells caused buyers to rush back to their offices to get other people excited about produce. For the most part, he says, "that excitement is gone" except at Tourtellot.

To create excitement these days is difficult, says Sigal. But he contends that Tourtellot has a niche in its industry

by being good at what they do and by the way they treat people.

"You have to do something very well to stand out," he says.

"We do that."

Sigal is talking about superior products and attention to its partners' needs. These partners include both buyers and suppliers and the attention Tourtellot affords them is given over the long haul.

"The suppliers we work with are doing the job and putting something premium at our door," he says.

On the other end, Tourtellot offers an uncommon value. The company helps its customers merchandise products and identify the best produce for their particular clientele. Joseph Ciccanesi is the Regional Sales Manager at Tourtellot and he's credited with bringing a modern flair to this old-fashioned market.

"What separates us is trying to transfer excitement to the consumer," he says.

Tourtellot is very active in getting to know its customers and Ciccanesi is the face most market owners see on any given day. Even though the company is far from a neighborhood fruit stand, he says that Tourtellot is the local produce market for the southeast.

"We believe there's more to selling produce than just selling a box of apples," he says.

This includes making people a priority and taking a detailed interest in how certain products will sell for certain buyers.

When this happens, explains Ciccanesi, more product goes through the register and there is less loss. Essentially, Tourtellot is helping its customers increase their profits by paying more attention to their needs.

"We focus on them and we do what it takes for our customers to say thank you," he says.

Jamie Sigal Manville is the Vice President of Tourtellot and recognizes the changes that have taken place in 50 years of Sigal family interest in the company.

She sees how the industry has changed, but also how some long-standing tenets last over time. The company has reinvented itself to answer the region's need for fresh produce. And Tourtellot has kept the customer in mind during this transition.

The company fills a niche for buyers and sellers as the largest full-line direct receiver in Rhode Island. This designation means that Tourtellot can supply produce as fresh as you can get anywhere, and they've been able to attract the customer who wants to purchase their fresh produce without going all the way to Boston.

For sellers, Tourtellot is a gem. Manville says that there is nothing glamorous to the produce business, but she gets excited along with the entire staff when the first peach of spring is delivered.

For years, Tourtellot has been the place local suppliers come to sell their produce and it's a unique relationship. "The loyalty between grower and buyer is a wonderful thing," says Manville.

Ciccanesi talks about the freshest native corn you can get coming right to the loading dock in the pick-up truck of a local RI grower. And he says these people contribute to everyone's growth.

"We grow because their successes are our successes," he says.

Possibly the most unique of Tourtellot's relationships is with the grape buyers who flock to the warehouse in the

fall. As the original wine grape direct seller and receiver, Tourtellot is slammed from the middle of September until Columbus Day with people enthralled with making their own wine.

The grapes come in direct from California—from the same house in Salinas that has been supplying the grapes for 50 years.

Manville explains that the excitement present during the grape selling period is the same feeling Tourtellot wants its customers to feel all year round.

"It has all the vibrancy of the good old days," she says. Everyone in the industry recognizes that the classic open-air marketplace is in the past. And they acknowledge that many people and businesses miss the vibrant produce market that once thrived in downtown providence.

But at Tourtellot, the mindset is that they are the closest a buyer or seller can get to the market of the past. And from the simple apple to the vibrant grape, bringing that excitement back is what they're all about.

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