

Mike Batt remembers being a young boy working for his grandfather at Newlon's in Pekin. He said he knew that he one day wanted to get into the grocery business himself.

Earlier this year that opportunity opened for Batt, and now he is a third-generation owner of the store.

Batt purchased the store from Eric Nale, who is related by marriage, and took over at the end of January.

"As a kid working here, (owning the store) is something I said I always wanted to do if I got the chance," Batt said.

Batt's opportunity came and after consulting with his grandfather, Andy Newlon, who purchased what was then called Brough's in 1978, he decided to move forward with the purchase.

"Before I even bought the store, I went to him and asked what I needed to do and whether or not he thought I could make it," Batt said. "I really asked him about the money side of things as far as what I need to do to make the business grow and get better."

Newlon said he feels like Batt has stepped right in and has done a nice job..

"I feel like he has done a real good job grasping everything," Newlon said. "I told him there is money to be made. It's not like it used to be because of the economy, but you can still make a decent living. The key is to keep the stock in here for the customers and take care of them."

Batt admits that things in the first few months have been harder than he expected, but he has three decades of experience to call on whenever he needs help.

"I've had a lot of support from the family and the employees that has helped out a bunch," Batt said. "Everybody in the family worked here growing up, so I've had a lot of help. It's harder than I thought it would be."

Outside of family, Batt said all of the employees have been a big help.

He said customers shouldn't expect wholesale changes, but said there will be some subtle ones.

"We're trying new things on the deli and we also want to bring back things we had 20 years ago," he said. "We've brought back the livers and gizzards that we sold when pap paw had it. We are working to try and get the ole potato wedges that we had.

"We also now have center-pieces for tombstones for Memorial Day and as we get the store stocked up, we will be looking at new options."

Newlon's deli is one of the only places in town where folks can get lunch in a hurry.

The store offers a full line of food served to order.

"From 11-1 it's non-stop at the deli and we are working hard to get new items so people don't have to eat the same thing everyday," Batt said. "We're hoping to do pizzas and have a regular menu where folks can know what we are serving everyday."

One of those items will be rib-eye sandwiches on Fridays.

"Our meat and our deli are our most popular things and we want to make sure to keep improving and growing in those areas," Batt said.

Batt said anyone wanting to order from the deli can call 967-4522 and their order will be ready

when they arrive.

As for what Batt wants people to know about him and his plans for the store, he said the focus is the same as it was when Newlon ran the store.

"We still have the same fresh meat that's cut and grinded daily," he said. "My last name is Batt, but it's still Newlon's with the same personal touch with the customers."