Jane took advantage of the soft real estate market and bought a major competitor. Of the three original Meche's locations, only the one at University and Padlock will remain open. They moved to the new location on Comanche Road, Willow Street and in New Berlin. The expanded store really stimulated last minute sales. Since then, the family has sold three franchises. Today, the company owns or franchises 12 stores, some under different names, in Lafayette, New Berlin, Appleton, Eau Claire, Bayfield, Bayview Bridge, Oconto, Menasha, and Alexandria. Meche's expansion has made a family business despite the rapid expansion. After attending Bradley's University, the couple moved to New Berlin, where they ran another Lafayette location. The New Berlin store is managed by a second son, Wadey, and his wife, Kim. This store is the one who is most responsible for making the dough. Though the couple owns the business, they prefer to keep their names behind the scenes. It's obvious that Jane Meche's business has been critical to the success of the business. Today, the family enjoys the freedom that comes with a successful business. The couple's success can be attributed to their hard work, dedication, and passion for their business.
orders daily to one or two dozen.

The lower unit sales were not all bad. Bulk orders had always been accompanied by big discounts. Says Rickey, “We make more on small amounts.” Fortunately, there was also an increase in walk-in traffic. The salesman who used to take a customer to eat a bacon-and-egg breakfast at a local restaurant was now making do on a cinnamon roll and black coffee.

“The growth really began when the oilfield glut came,” he says. “That’s when we decided now’s the time to expand.” In doing so, the Mechies were able to take advantage of lower real estate prices.

AN ADDED BONUS HAS BEEN the franchises which the Mechies have sold in recent years. And they hope to branch out even more. “We’re looking for a few good people,” says Rickey. They would even consider expanding beyond the geographical realm of Acadiana, although this is the area they like best. At any rate, they are keeping their options open. Marketing the Meche concept is not difficult. “They call me. I don’t call them,” says Jane. “The people like our product.”

Exactly why they like it is proprietary information; there are some trade secrets that the family will not divulge. They will go so far as to say that the dough base is manufactured (and patented) by Pillsbury. What they do with it remains a mystery.

A recipe comes with the base, but the Mechies alter it in a manner that only they are familiar with. “If you don’t make compensations, you’re not going to wind up with the same doughnut,” says Rickey. The frying technique and glazing process are other closely guarded secrets.

“It’s expensive and it’s difficult to make. If you don’t know what you’re doing, you can’t make it. That’s why you don’t see so many doughnut shops popping up,” Rickey says. Meche’s doughnuts are made without benefit of mechanical assistance. “We don’t use machines. It’s all hand-cut,” says Jane.

The Mechies are trying to compensate for the increased interest in healthy foods, of which doughnuts are not exactly a staple. The all-vegetable oil that is used in the frying process has no cholesterol, they say, nor does anyone in the family have a cholesterol problem. Eventually, Rickey hopes to expand into baked items, offering cupcakes, brownies and muffins, including those of the oat bran variety. “People are health conscious now,” he says.

The company has expanded its lunch trade by offering fast food at many locations. Some of the stores don’t have room for such staples, but those that do report a brisk business. “It’s going very well,” reports Rickey. “I just had to increase the grill part.” Jane’s recipes are used, and the food is prepared from scratch. “All my short orders are seasoned to the max,” she says.

Some stores also feature plate lunches, a possibility that Rickey and his wife are currently considering. Jane, however, is not convinced that this is a good idea. “We went out there and talked to her
about it last night,” Rickey says. He thinks he can win her over to the idea.

THAT STRONG FAMILY PULL HAS been in place since the beginning of the venture. The Meche children were always around the store, helping Mom out with the chores. Jane says with obvious pride, “I never paid for a babysitter.” With limited employment opportunities, she always found jobs that allowed her children to be with her.

At one time, she had a delivery route for the Daily Advertiser newspaper because her children could accompany her in the car. “I had to talk my way into getting that job,” she recalls. She was the first female to start a route for the paper. When she moved to doughnuts, the same stipulation applied: children would be present. “My brother slept under the showcase many days,” Rickey says.

Her children also appear to have inherited her strong work sense. “They love the business,” she says. “They can be sick and they don’t miss.” Rickey had a heart transplant operation two years ago, but has not scaled back his involvement in the business.

Although Jane’s husband, Ewell, is plagued by ill health brought about by a stroke, he has also been involved in the family business, but from a more practical point of view. He filled in wherever needed over the years, and was handy with carpentry and plumbing skills.

“He kept up all the machines,” Jane says. The business would not have survived if such chores would have been hired out, Rickey explains. There was never any resentment or question of where the directives came from. “He knew who had the business head,” says her son.

Jane professes to be retired, but Rickey quickly interjects that it is only a semi-retirement. She oversees the Willow Street store, saying, “Oh yeah. I still go over there and raise hell.”

Some of Jane’s talent for the business world may have come from her father. “Mama didn’t have no business sense. She was so good she gave everything away,” Jane says. What held her sharecropper father back was his fear of debt and basic mistrust of banks. “You don’t have no money if you owe it,” he would often say.

The advice made an impression on Jane, and has been part of her philosophy ever since. “My bills have been paid one to two months ahead of the time due,” she says. “I don’t owe anybody. We don’t have much, but what we got is paid for.”

There’s apparently a limit to how much even she will gamble.