

JUNGLE JIM'S

INTERNATIONAL MARKET

The Jungle Jim Story

James O. Bonaminio was born in 1949 in Lorain Ohio, 30 miles outside of Cleveland. His father, Clem, was a steelworker; his mother, Marie, a housewife and sometime saleswoman. For a while, she peddled Fuller brushes door to door. Pushing a baby buggy, she discovered, was a terrific ice-breaker. Jim swears he remembers hearing sales pitches from inside the carriage...

By the time Jim was 6, he was eager to start earning money for himself. He began by offering to do odd jobs for neighbors. By age 13 he was collecting golf balls from a nearby course, scrubbing and then selling them to avid golfers...

In high school, he washed cars and trucks for Ohio Edison, hitchhiking five miles to their parking lot, hauling his own hose, bucket and rags... At age 19, he worked out deals to sell pillows, carpet remnants and purses. Jim stocked the 1948 milk truck he'd snagged for \$50 and became a garage sale on wheels.

After purses, produce looked easy. It wasn't. Jim thought he was doing everything right, buying directly from farmers, offering rock-bottom prices, setting up a stand where motorists could see him. But they whizzed by the nondescript peddler, then stopped mere yards down the road for someone they recognized. He was about to give up when he realized, it all had to do with being established.

"After purses, produce looked easy. It wasn't."

That night he got a phone call from a farmer who had 45,000 pounds of white potatoes that had been rejected from a potato chip factory. He'd let them go for \$150; was Jim interested? A light bulb flashed over Jim's head. "Yeah," he replied, "if you'll leave us your truck for the weekend." Jim bought two baby scales, donned a white apron, crayoned a large sign offering 20 pounds for 75 cents, hired a couple of 10-year-olds to bag and weigh. Suddenly, he was a recognizable merchant.

In 1971, he set up his first semi-permanent produce stand in a parking lot, on the corner of Erie and High Street in Hamilton. He worked 21-hour days, slept on the premises and showered under a hose behind the building. When the place sold, he had to move. The same thing happened with several other locations, including the corner of Symmes and Route 4 in Fairfield. Vacant lots that had gone unnoticed for months suddenly became hot when he landed on them. Jim mused that he'd missed his calling; he should probably have gone into selling real estate.



1948 Milk truck, Jim's garage sale on wheels!



Jungle and his dad unloading watermelons. Route 4 across from Fisher Body.



Jungle at Symmes road and Route 4

In 1974, he found land he wanted to purchase. Owners Jim Ivers and Bruce Cunagin were willing to sell, but a \$10,000 down payment wasn't enough; they insisted he'd need a co-signer. There was a silence. Then Bruce's mother, Fanny, a third owner spoke up: "I'll co-sign."

"He worked 21-hour days, slept on the premises and showered under a hose behind the building."

Jim Bonaminio has come to believe in guardian angels. He had two: Fanny Cunagin and Esther Benzing. Esther was president of Fairfield's planning commission in 1975 when city officials were reluctant to okay a permanent fruit and vegetable market because the area was zoned industrial, not commercial. The commission admitted an exception had been made, though, for a nearby Arthur Treacher's because that was where workers ate lunch. "What's the difference," Esther queried,

"between having a fish sandwich and having an apple or an orange?" She banged her gavel. "Permission granted. Good luck, son."

Jungle Jim's International Market was born. A mere cubicle at 4,200 square feet, but it was a start. Before long, more and more products were added, and expansion continues to this day.

Jungle Jim's International Market is a place where the first rule is to treat customers like gold. The second is to have fun doing it. People come from several states away for the unique shopping experience Jungle Jim's International Market offers. A wide selection of food from all over the world, red hot deals and, of course, fun!

Excerpted from an article by Coleen Armstrong



Jungle painting the animal pond.

The Jungle Timeline: A Foodie Paradise Isn't Born Overnight!

1971

Jungle starts his first roadside produce stand



1975

Land is purchased in Fairfield and the first 4,200sq. ft. market opens



1982

15,000sq. ft. expansion adds groceries and more



1983

The animal pond and palm trees are added



1989

45,000sq. ft. expansion includes specialty foods



1993

135,000sq. ft. expansion makes Jungle Jim's International Market even larger



2001

85,000sq. ft. expansion including the monorail and the Oscar Event Center begins



2012

Jungle Jim's 2nd location opens in Eastgate, OH