

When they closed the Latta Road Center, the company opened the new one in the Chili-Paul store, just for employees.

"We're working out the bugs to determine if it will be implemented elsewhere," Peterson commented.

That kind of responsiveness to the needs of its employees gets the company a lot of attention.

For the last six years, *Working Mother Magazine* has recognized the grocery chain as among the nation's best employers.

In its October, 1995, issue, the New York City-based magazine gave Wegmans high marks for competitive pay, opportunities for advancement, support for child care, and flexible hours.

The magazine reported that Wegmans' employees can now "experiment with alternative schedules" that fit them best.

"Such innovations are a welcome change of pace in an industry that frequently demands weekend, evening, and overtime hours from its employees," the article said.

Gay feels that she's "very fortunate" to have such flexibility, especially as a full-time employee.

With two other children at home, Ryan, 11, and Aaron, 9, and a husband who works different shifts, Gay takes advantage of being able to work from 6:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. some days and 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on others.

It's no wonder that Wegmans was included in the 1993 edition of *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America*.

With about 13,500 employees (including its Chase-Pittkin home centers subsidiary) in the Rochester area alone, Wegmans is considered by many to be something of a local institution.

Company chairman Robert Wegman and his son, Daniel Wegman, chief executive officer, have created a corporate culture that encourages innovation and aggressiveness, said

The Wegmans' philosophy of continuous improvement encourages "intellectual risk-taking" and gives employees at every level an opportunity to take ownership of their contributions, Peterson said.

In that atmosphere, a part-time employee at the Pittsford store who grew up baking traditional Italian cookies proposed - and successfully implemented - making and marketing the cookies at Wegmans, Peterson recounted.

Sandy Parker, vicepresident of the Industrial Management Council, which gathers information on employers in the community, said the company is "not afraid to take a non-traditional approach."

Wegmans "designs programs to suit employees with a variety of needs who are in various stages of life," according to Parker.

Any employee, regardless of age, who meets the company's requirements for hours and performance can benefit from Wegmans' work-scholarship program, which was the 1990 grand-prize winner of former president George Bush's Points of Light program.

Spending in the neighborhood of 25 million dollars since the program started in 1984, Wegmans has chosen 7,200 winners to date.

Elena Tomanovich, received the scholarships twice, and used them to earn a bachelor's degree and is currently pursuing a master's degree. She's enrolled in the public administration program at SUNY College at Brockport.

The 24-year-old inventory control manager at Wegmans' distribution center on Brooks Avenue has come a long way since she started working with the company in her sophomore year of high school.

"They believe in developing their people," especially in the mentoring program after she graduated college, Tomanovich said.

As a management trainee, she was coached by an experi-

one is a frequent speaker in German's class. A retail specialist in one of the Rochester stores, the young woman explains the various career opportunities at Wegmans.

According to German, Wegmans' greatest strength is giving people authority and responsibility far beyond others.

"They tell individual department managers to make purchase decisions, which is unheard of in most supermarket companies," he added.

Lee Junkans, assistant dean for career services at the University of Rochester's William E. Simon School of Business Administration, told a similar story.

"We've had people going into marketing, purchasing, and operations functions who have moved forward very rapidly," Junkans said.

"I never would have believed that one of our graduates could have made store manager within two years," said Junkans.

Heather Kitzman started working at the Irondequoit store as a management intern and now manages a store in Buffalo.

She credits her success to Wegmans' willingness to utilize all her business school skills, especially the ability to work with people.

"As the store manager, you work with department managers in a fast-paced, risk-taking, change-oriented environment," she said.

"You have the opportunity to make your success happen as fast as you want it," Kitzman added.

"The word is getting around college campuses that Wegmans is a great opportunity," Junkans declared.

The key is emphasizing people over process, said Peterson, echoing the company's philosophy that "good people, working toward a common goal, can accomplish anything they set out to do."

So when Wegmans says, "Every day you get our best," it applies to customers and employees alike.