

"I'm getting emotional," Valerie Snyder said, gazing out over the orchards of the 40-acre farm on Baney Road north in Ashland. "I grew up here."

When Snyder closes Mitchell's Orchard and Farm Market at the end of the year, she is leaving behind more than just a business; the farm was her family home.

However, Snyder, the manager of Mitchell's Orchard, didn't want to sell the family business to another proprietor.

Instead, a niece who grew up visiting the homestead plans to move her family to the property and turn it back into a private farm.

"They have cattle, they'll probably have horses, and they have young kids," Snyder said. "When I was a kid, we had all the animals, and that's more than likely what they'll do. It would make me happy to see that, to go back to what it was."

The beloved farm that sold fresh fruits, beers and wines and hosted many events was the brainchild of Snyder's father, Mitch Goschinski.

The local businessman had already founded Mitchell's Moving and Storage in 1965 and Fin Feather Fur Outfitters in 1985.

His sons would ultimately take over those businesses, as Mitch Goschinski moved on to his next venture, coupling his love of farming with his entrepreneurial savvy.

The Goschinskis started Mitchell's Orchard as a roadside fruit stand about 30 years ago, Snyder said.

Eventually, it became a year-round operation, selling wine and beer.

"I came here for my parents, 19 years ago, to help my mom," Snyder said. "Because my dad was working my mom to death, so I came here to help them out."

Mitchell Goschinski died in November 2009 at 73.

After her mother, Yvonne Goschinski, died in October 2018 at 81, Snyder decided the time had come for her to move on.

"It's my time now to do something I want to do for myself," Snyder said. "You work six or seven days a week, and you always worry about everything, and you try to make everybody happy. So I'm ready to hang out with my grandkids and enjoy my life a little bit more."

On Saturday, Mitchell's will hold its 11th annual Oktoberfest. Titled "The Last Dance," the Northcoast Mix band play its lineup of polka and oldies tunes.

Plus, Snyder's oldest grandson, Kaden Rogers, will play his saxophone with the band, carrying on a family musical tradition.

Snyder organized the first Oktoberfest in 2009 to reunite her father with his polka band. The event marked the patriarch's first and final Oktoberfest.

Mitchell's also will have many beer and wine vendors on hand to fill the free, take-home glass that comes with each ticket.

Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased at the door. The price also includes brats, hamburgers and more.

Last year's Oktoberfest brought out around 600 guests.

"It's a big family event," Snyder said. "It's my favorite out of the whole year."

The family farm originally became an event center 11 years ago, when Ev DeVaul, the former executive director of the United Way of Ashland County, asked Snyder if he could hold a wine tasting event at Mitchell's.

Renovations soon began on the barn, which dates back to the early 1900s. Since then, the venue has hosted a number of weddings, fundraisers and charity events.

"Whatever event people asked me to do, I pretty much always said yes, just to get people in the door," Snyder said. "Because we're off the beaten path."

Snyder will hold the final event at Mitchell's Orchard's on Dec. 30 for the No Child Goes Hungry nonprofit.

"That's in honor of my mother," Snyder said. "My mother was always about feeding the children."

Snyder will continue to make cider three times a week throughout the rest of the year.

She also made sure her buyers were taken care of, and Doug Fitch, owner of Fitch Pharm Farm, will take over her sour cherry and bulk blueberry orders, starting in January.

Even though she's taking a much-needed breather, Snyder plans to save her liquor license, just to keep her options open.

"I'm going to wait and see what the future may hold," Snyder said. "I'm not promising anything. But I'm going to keep it in my name, and hope that I can put it on hold. I want to kind of see what downtown does, if anybody picks it up and does something down there for a wine

and beer store.

"I'm not going to rush into anything — I'm tired. I really want just to chill out for a while. Just to relax."

Looking back over 19 years, Snyder said the best part was the customers. They're also the worst part to leave behind.

"A lot of my customers are like family," Snyder said. "If they're older people, I carry out whatever they buy. I have a lot of older 'Grandma' people hug me, kiss me, tell me they love me."

Snyder's own family growing up was fairly large. She was the youngest of the five, with two older brothers and two sisters.

"I couldn't have done it without my family," Snyder said. "Because, whenever I needed them, they were all here."

Snyder expects the auction she plans to hold early next year will hit her deeply.

"That'll be the hardest part, meaning my parents are really gone," Snyder said. "Like, this is it. That's my closure. But I know it's life, and we all have to deal with it."

Even though letting go is never easy, Snyder is ready to start the next chapter — for her life and for the farm.

"All good things must come to an end," Snyder said. "So I feel it's time. I really do feel good about my decision."