



# Go to Joe's

## – a Place to Eat, Play, Grow

By Heather Clarke

**S**ITTING NEXT DOOR TO A DOZEN BIG-BOX GROCERY STORES you'd think most farm stands wouldn't stand a chance against the competition.

But Joe's Place, located in the heart of downtown Vancouver, isn't just any farm stand, it's a homegrown farm and orchard that offers produce and berries picked daily – the freshest, tastiest you can find in the area.

Joe Beaudoin, for which Joe's Place is named, planted and nurtured his first garden in 1944 at the ripe old age of four. When he was six, his family moved to a 5 acre piece of land where Joe continued to garden and grow.

In high school he planted his first orchard and started selling strawberries from a roadside stand.

His strawberries were so good he started selling to two local drive-ins for their milkshakes. He did this all before he was 18 and before he had any equipment of his own. In fact, he borrowed his neighbor's horse and a tractor from the school.

After high school Joe went to Clark College and continued to do a little farming on the side, but started working part-time at a department store in Vancouver. Upon graduation Joe became manager of that store and ended up working there for the next 30 years. During his years as the store manager Joe would buy farm equipment, hire people to run it and farm as much as he could – all while also working full-time at the store.

Fast forward to 2009 and Joe is still on those original 5 acres of family land, but it's grown to include more than 90 acres of farmland within the Vancouver city limits. Joe works full-time on the farm and orchard, which now includes a full-line store, restaurant, bakery and cold storage.

Joe currently farms in five different locations, all within two miles of the farm.

On the orchard they grow 30 varieties of apples, including Joe's original variety Pink Pearl, which has a pearl colored outside and a pink inside, and the

original Gravenstein the premier apple for apple sauce. They also grow all the major tree fruits including cherries, pears and prunes and all the major berry crops including strawberries and blueberries.

You'll also find any kind of vegetable that will grow in Western Washington, including tomatoes, corn, green beans, pumpkins, squash, beets and melons. Depending on the day, there is always something freshly picked that morning.

"We want to give our customers something better than they can buy anywhere else," says Joe.

People come from miles away to visit the retail store on the farm.

It has a commercial bakery and kitchen. Run by Joe's wife Gayle, the bakery and kitchen offers fresh-baked cookies, muffins, turnovers, cobblers and many flavors of fudge.

Gayle is known as "Mrs. Joe" and all her homemade products are labeled as such. Mrs. Joe's fudge is available in 20 different varieties – some with nuts, some with fruits – all delicious.

The retail store, at about 8,000 square



**FACING PAGE:**

Joe and his wife Gayle standing in front of their products in the retail store.

**PAGE 11 TOP:**

Mouth-watering baked goods are on display at Joe's Place.

**PAGE 11 BOTTOM LEFT:**

Joe inspects his strawberries.

**PAGE 11 BOTTOM RIGHT:**

This fort maze was built by Joe.

*Photos courtesy of John Bieker.*



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feet, offers an array of treats.

In addition to Mrs. Joe's delicacies, you can buy nuts, canning supplies, cookbooks, firewood and of course, among the freshest, tastiest fruits and vegetables that you can find in Vancouver.

The store is managed by Joe, Gayle and their middle daughter Dani Bender. All of their seven children grew up working the farm or in the retail store and they currently have three grandchildren working in the store.

On Saturdays Joe's Place opens up its kitchen from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. to serve real Italian frittata, authentic French crepes and Joe's Special. The frittata is filled with fresh veggies from the farm, while the French crepes are covered in homegrown fruits and homemade syrups.

Joe's Special is made with ground meat and onion sautéed with chopped spinach, eggs, and parmesan cheese, served with a side of sautéed mushrooms.

Although they have never paid to advertise, the restaurant is bustling with regulars and visitors from afar, every Saturday.

In addition to the seasonal vegetables and fruits, there are also activities offered year-round.

If you don't mind a little hard work, Joe offers u-pick strawberries, raspberries, peppers, tomatoes, eggplants and, of course pumpkins in the fall and Christmas trees in December.

The pumpkin festival in October has face painting, hay rides and a corn stock teepee. For Christmas, the entire farm gets decorated for the holidays and you can buy fancy nuts and Christmas cakes from the bakery.

During these busy times Joe's can expect about 2,000 people a day.

Year round, kids love to run through and explore Joe's original fort maze made from eight truck loads of old tree props (used in orchards to hold trees up). The fort maze includes bastions that allow you to get a bird's eye view of the entire farm. You can also take a ride between 4 and 5:30 p.m. on their hay wagon any day that they are open.

Although the festivals and seasonal events are a treat, Joe finds that 95

percent of his business is regular customers who come by daily or weekly to get the fresh-picked produce.

“It's the only place in Vancouver where you can go and get berries or vegetables picked fresh that morning,” shares Joe. “If we have berries the next day, they are sold as day old. The peaches are picked as ripe as they can be.”

No big-box grocery store can offer that freshness, which of course makes Joe's produce the tastiest and most revered.

Coming up on 69 years old this July, Joe must love what he does to keep working so hard.

“I'm developing a product that I'm proud of. People come here because it's the best. My satisfaction comes from seeing and serving happy people,” Joe says with a smile.

*Joe's Place is located at 701 Northeast 112 Avenue, Vancouver WA 98694 and is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. June 1 through Christmas. January through April they are only open Fridays and Saturdays and they are closed the month of May. ■*