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Local spotlight**Joe's Produce unveils its jumbo expansion**

The store's growth to 33,000-square-foot site features prepared food, a coffee stand, olive bar.

Alexa Stanard / Special to The Detroit News

LIVONIA – Joe's Produce recently unveiled an expansion that grew the third-generation family-owned store by more than half into a sprawling, 33,000-square-foot store on the same patch of land along Seven Mile where the company started in 1945 as a roadside fruit stand.

The expansion, which also includes a 3,500-square-foot porch and remodeling of the existing space, has allowed Joe's to add gourmet groceries, prepared foods and a coffee stand, among other items. The store has doubled its staff and has seen its revenues double over those of last year.

The store "needed a face-lift," said owner Joe Maiorana, 45, who has run the store for about 20 years. A decision to expand the store – its last major size increase was in the 1980s – led Maiorana to travel the country checking out gourmet grocery trends.

Out of those travels came the decision to add an extensive cheese section, an olive bar, deli, prepared foods (the store's chef, sous chef and pastry chef are all Schoolcraft College culinary school grads), made-to-order salads and sandwiches, and elaborate pastries. There also are expanded fresh flower and wine sections and dry groceries.

But the store's main feature remains its produce. Maiorana wakes up by 1 a.m. every day to visit Eastern Market and the Detroit Produce Terminal to select enough fresh fruits and vegetables to fill a 48-foot truck nearly twice. The store takes inventory every night to ensure the freshness of its product.

"What you're buying here was purchased either this morning or yesterday," Maiorana said. "It's designed for maximum freshness."

Maiorana grew up next to the store, riding the tractor through the original 80-acre orchard with his grandfather, Gaspare Maiorana. Both his parents worked at the store, and his father, Joe Sr., showed him how to select the best produce.

The family dedication to quality has earned Joe's a loyal following.

"It is hands-down the best produce in Michigan," said Pam Marvin, a Farmington Hills resident who has shopped at Joe's since 1990. "I bought a quarter of a watermelon at Joe's the other day. I had to buy laundry stuff at another store, and their watermelon was whitish pink. Joe's was red, and theirs was like albino. And he has artichokes the size of your head."

The store never closed during the expansion, with workers retiling floors and adding new refrigerated cases at night, and customers patiently working their way through the dust. The result is larger, easy-to-navigate aisles and appealing granite, steel and wood décor.

Alexa Stanard is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.

Joe's Produce

Owner: Joe Maiorana

Founded: 1945

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