

Glashoff pumpkin patch era comes to a close

By Nancy Dingler

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A historic chapter in Solano County has come to a close with the close of operations at Glashoff's pumpkin patch in Suisun Valley. Maria Glashoff says that the Glashoff family legacy began shortly after the California Gold Rush of 1849.

Two brothers who were butchers came from Germany - not with the intention of digging for gold, but supplying beef to the hungry miners and the many eateries that were springing up in San Francisco. They were God-fearing Lutherans and joined the growing local community of Germans in Cordelia.

Cordelia was on the main road between the gold fields and San Francisco. Its location was so ideal that the town was soon a booming trade center. When the railroad arrived in 1868, the town flourished. Hiram Rush drove cattle across the plains from Indiana and eventually established the well-known and famously wealthy Rush Ranch in the Portrero Hills. His cattle operation supplied beef to the M. & J. Glashoff Cordelia Meat Market. Due to the Glashoff brothers' phenomenal success, they were able to return to Germany with their families for visits and encourage other family members to migrate to California.

Around the turn of the 20th century, emboldened by his uncles' success, nephew Hermann Glashoff came to the Suisun Valley. Hermann married Margaret Sass and they produced three sons and three daughters.

Martin Glashoff was their second-born. Martin would marry Elsada Chadbourne (namesake of Chadbourne Road). Elsada's unusual name is a combination of Elizabeth and Sadie. Martin and Elsada settled on acreage along Rockville Road and began raising fruit trees, vegetables and three children; Nancy, Phillip and Larry.

It was a bucolic, enviable lifestyle. The children learned about hard work and the seasonal changes around the ranch, along with riding horses and raising all types of critters. They attended local schools, graduating from Armijo High School before heading off to college. During the summer, the ranch chores would be broken up by swim outings in Suisun Creek.

What would later become the Glashoff pumpkin patch began as a 4-H project by their youngest son, Larry. Larry decided to grow pumpkins and with his success came a bumper crop.

The next logical thing to do was to set up a pumpkin stand along Rockville Road. That same year, 1967, Larry grew the “big” pumpkin. The “big” pumpkin weighed in at 109 pounds.

Martin packed the pumpkin in rice hulls so it could withstand shipping and then they entered it in a national contest. It was 15th largest in the entire country. As times changed, Larry stacked the pumpkins in the back of his pickup truck in a marketing display, as well as along the driveway. Before long, the pumpkin field turned into a public place where people could come pick their own.

Elsada started a fruit stand in the early 1970s with the idea that when her sons Larry and Phil returned from college, there would be a way for them to have an income.

Nancy managed the fruit stand. Maria married Larry in 1983, and with Nancy, they started the Glashoff bakery. Maria and Larry’s union produced three children, Jacob, Elizabeth and Lucas. Maria is a dental hygienist with an understanding boss who did not object to her taking the month of October off to manage the pumpkin patch.

Phil and Larry branched out, with Phil working as manager of the Nut Tree orchards in Vacaville for many years. The brothers opened up a fruit stand across the road (Interstate 80) and were there for several years. The stand was closed in 1979. The acreage has been swallowed up by the Vacaville factory stores.

Phil became interested in welding when he attended California Polytechnic University, Pomona, in Southern California. He helped build parade floats for the New Year’s Day parade in Pasadena. He began welding art pieces and over time became recognized in the art world as a fine artist.

His son, Chad, is carrying on the family artistic legacy and is earning a reputation as an accomplished artist as well. Chad’s mother, Lorianne, runs the art gallery at Mankas Corners, where their work is on display and for sale.

The year 1985 was eventful. Elsada passed away and the pumpkin patch tours were started. Larry’s high school friend, Mike Loeb, came with some great artist ideas to include scarecrows, sunflowers and other eye-catching art displays to enhance the pumpkin patch experience.

Hay and pony rides were added to the attraction. Mike is heavily involved in the local school district classroom art program and designs the award-winning Fairfield display at the Solano County Fair.

In the meantime, Larry and Marie’s children are all grown up. The last child, Lucas, is a

senior at Armijo High. Jacob is working while attending Solano Community College and Elizabeth is in college at Cal State Chico. It is time for another change. Larry has been working for a number of years in management for Hines Nursery in Winters. Nancy ran the bakery for a couple of years by herself. When Martin, her dad, passed away in 2000, she decided it was time to close it and retire.

As Marie explained, "It is time for a change. The pumpkin patch has been a worthwhile endeavor - a fun thing to do for the community. Now it is time to slow down and have some family time. We are all going to miss the pumpkin patch tradition and the old-fashioned nostalgic experience it evoked, but we can certainly understand changes. In the Bob Dylan refrain, "the times are a chang'n' " The time has come to bid godspeed and goodwill to the Glashoffs, who provided the county with a great October Halloween country experience.

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