



L-R: Eric and Kathy Rivard; Andrew, Mary, Doug and Matt Joyer.

by Kelly Gates

Waldoch Farm of Lino Lakes, MN, has been around since 1916 when the grandfather of current owner, Mary Joyer, started it to raise chickens and hay. He routinely took the hay by horse and buggy to a farmer's market in St. Paul where he worked during the week as a typesetter for a printing company. On the weekends, he tended to the farm.

Over the years, the man added produce to his list of offerings. The vegetables were sold from a roadside stand on his Lino Lakes property. Eventually, several generations of family members took over the business.

"My father was an airline pilot, but he liked to work at the farm too," said Mary. "As kids, we would help raise the produce and sell it at farmer's markets and from the roadside stand to earn money."

When Mary's father retired from his full time job, he added even more produce to the mix. The farm then grew things like eggplant, peppers, summer squash, sweet corn, watermelon, muskmelon, pumpkins, gourds, cucumbers and green beans, to name a few. The family traveled to five different markets each week to sell the vegetables, along with peddling them out front at the grandfather's farm.

By the late 1960s, Mary's father decided to construct a greenhouse to grow the type of vegetables he wanted to plant in the produce fields. Mary's mother took advantage of the extra space and began growing flowers for the spring market, another green house was soon added. The family business, Waldoch Farm, continued to evolve in the decades that followed.

"We sold mostly at farmer's markets until 1982 when we opened a pick-your-own strawberry field, then pick-your-own produce," said Mary. "From there, my family bought the last 40 acres that my grandpa owned and in 1990, we built a garden center on the property."

Two 24 ft. X 120 ft. gutter-connected greenhouses were the first to go up. In 1992, a third bay was added to create a retail space, display area for garden accessories and storage. Five 30 ft X 96 ft. heated hoop houses and five cold frames round out the facility, with auxiliary heat to warm them when necessary.

The majority of the annuals sold there are grown from plugs to 4 1/2 inch potted material. Geraniums, verbena and coleus are among the many items in inventory.

"We also do some 48 and 72 flats, many hanging baskets, mixed containers and we have one greenhouse dedicated to growing perennials," said Mary. "The perennial greenhouse has roll-up sides so we can cool the house more effectively and condition the plants for being outdoors. One of our houses is dedicated to vegetable production, we are well known for our selection of vegetable plants."

The plants displayed outside are under a shade structure. Many are on wheeled wagons that can be quickly and easily rolled into a shed at night if there is a threat of frost.

Most of the plants are started from plugs. The family begins planting them when the first shipment arrives in February. Another round of plugs are planted in March so customers who visit the garden center in late spring or early summer have finished material in various stages of growth to choose from.

Mary, her sister Kathy, and her two sons, Andrew and Doug, have found other ways to cater their offerings to customers. For instance, Doug, who is in charge of produce production, grows an abundance of yellow bell peppers along with all the other vegetables Waldoch Farm sells.

"There is a large population of Eastern European and Bosnian people living in this area and a while ago, we realized that these customers use a lot of that particular pepper when cooking," explained Mary. "They are some of our biggest pick your own customers. In the evenings, when our garden center is closed, the produce stand remains open with a self-serve box so people can buy produce at their convenience."

The stand is often filled with cover hay and alfalfa during the late fall and winter months. The same self-service setup applies.

As the Joyers continue the growing tradition at the farm, they continually find ways to incorporate better efficiencies into the operation. Recently, they remodeled the retail greenhouse, moving hanging baskets, swapping out benches and rearranging for a more suitable customer flow.

"We used to have our hanging baskets overhead, parallel to the door, but customers would walk in and couldn't see past them," said Mary. "We now hang them perpendicular to the door so they can see all the way to the back."

The space was also filled production benches and narrow aisles, making it difficult for shoppers to reach the different varieties of plants. All of those have been replaced by wheeled benches and now, the aisles between are much wider. According to Mary, the adjustments were modest but they were effective enough for people to question if the space had been expanded.

Another upgrade was made to the facade of the garden center. A front porch was added to make it more inviting. And, the company even acquired new shopping carts — double and triple shelf — for customers to pile on a multitude of plants.

The Joyers plan to continue making changes here and there to keep their business in peak condition. If the farm's history is any indicator of its future successes, the investments that are being made now are setting Waldoch Farm up for many more decades of plant and produce profitability.