

# Standing Through the Years

*Evans Fruit Stand has offered local produce for half a century*

By Lori Russell

From the road, not much appears to have changed in the half-century that Evans Fruit Stand has been in business on 2nd Street.

The pale yellow cinder block building tucked against the basalt hill east of downtown The Dalles is stocked high with local produce, much of it grown on the same 50 acres that Samuel Evans planted when he migrated to Mosier in the late 1800s.

Samuel's grandson, Forrest, and Forrest's wife, Raegan, the current owners, pride themselves on providing locally grown, in-season produce.

The stand opens in late May when Oregon strawberries and asparagus begin arriving and closes with the last of the winter squash, corn and pumpkins at the end of October. Cherries, marionberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries fill the shelves in June, followed by peaches, apricots, corn and sweet

onions in July. August brings tomatoes, melons and plenty of summer squash.

Just as fruits and vegetables come in and out of season, so do the trends in growing, selling and consuming them.

Forrest, a third-generation cherry farmer, was born and raised on the land his grandfather settled. As a child, he remembers his father working the orchard, while his mother, Ardet, sold the family fruit at a roadside stand.

Customers have shopped at the current location since the early 1960s.

"It was still the old highway then," says Forrest. "I remember talk about what would happen when the new interstate was completed."

The opening of Interstate 84 to the north was only one of several changes

Ardet and her family witnessed from the fruit stand during the next five decades.

In the 1960s and 1970s, canning and jam making was a popular way for farm women to provide local produce for their large families to enjoy out of season.

"Some of the women would order seven 30-pound boxes of peaches," Forrest recalls.

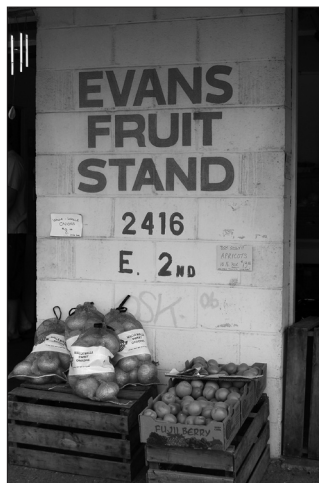
While interest in home canning waned in the 1980s and 1990s, the Evanses have noted a renewed interest in the past few years as customers young and old, male and female, are becoming more conscious of where their food comes from and how it is grown.

"We have had customers order 3- or 4-pound boxes of fruit and they are asking more questions about whether or not the growers use pesticides," Forrest says, noting the number of varieties of fruit also has increased since Ardet opened the stand. "Years ago, the only peaches farm wives would buy for canning were Red Havens or Elbertas. Now there are 15 to 20 good varieties."

Gravenstein apples—once the gold standard for sauce and pies—have become more difficult to find. While the Evanses still sell these and other varieties from their orchard, Gravenstein rootstock is becoming harder to acquire as new varieties are developed.

As the price of apples dropped through the years, the family—like many area orchardists—replaced its apple trees with cherries. Today, the Mosier orchard is 80 percent cherries, with the remaining acreage in apples, peaches and other stone fruit.

In 2000, after nearly 40 years, Ardet turned the fruit stand over to her son and daughter-in-law. One



Walla Walla sweet onions and apricots await customers at the entrance to Evans Fruit Stand.



**Raegan and Forrest Evans at the family fruit stand that has been a fixture on East 2nd Street since the 1960s.**

his homegrown tomatoes from Dallesport.

Since taking over the business, Raegan has been responsive to her customers' request for fruits and vegetables.

Sometimes, that means growing the item herself. When several people asked for pie cherries, Raegan planted a few trees on their property. As requests expanded, she added pears, crabapples, apples, peaches, plums and apricots. One year, she decided to grow tomatoes.

"The man who supplied our tomatoes at the time said he grew 1,000 plants," Raegan says. "I thought I'd put in the same, but I stopped at 750."

She shakes her head.

"We were overrun with produce," she says. "I just couldn't keep up while working at the fruit stand six days a week."

These days, they stick to growing stone fruits.

"You can get carried away thinking you can grow it all yourself," says Forrest. "You can't."

"With such good fruits and vegetables grown around here, we don't need to," adds Raegan. "I'm glad that the other producers are there."

The two are happy to continue working in the family business. Their sons, Sam and Casey, help with cherry harvest each summer, but have not decided whether to take over the orchard and fruit stand when their parents retire.

"The pace of farming is changing," says Forrest. "You can't make a living off a small farm any longer, unless you have another job."

Still, Casey, who works as a chef in Portland, has created his own niche at the fruit stand, selling gelato he makes with seasonal fruit. ■

*Evans Fruit Stand is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday through Friday through October 31. In September, look for peaches, apples, pears, potatoes, sweet onions, nectarines and watermelons. Corn, brussels sprouts, beets, kraut cabbage, pumpkins and squash usually are available through October.*

of the first changes the couple made was to expand their selection to include produce grown from suppliers on both sides of the Columbia River.

"We sell local fruit in season as it comes on," says Raegan, noting that ensures a variety of produce that changes weekly. It also means customers who come looking for strawberries in July are out of luck. "California has three seasons, so people get used to seeing strawberries in the grocery stores. In Oregon, strawberry season lasts about three weeks."

While chain stores receive produce bundled on semitrucks several times a week, the Evanses must make their own rounds to pick up produce.

With Forrest busy harvesting cherries at their orchard in July, Raegan is on the road picking up berries and other produce. She often makes the rounds to Troutdale, Bingen and Parkdale in a single day. When Forrest finishes harvest, he takes over the driving—up to 1,000 miles a week—picking up fruit from Hermiston to Portland, while Raegan runs the stand.

Forrest remembers only one supplier ever delivering produce—an elderly truck farmer who brought