



## COVER STORY

# A Family That Extends to the Community

By Jenna Caputo

Photos by MarkBolles.com

Some people search for their life's calling for many years. Some people are just born into it. That's how it was for Lawrence DeVoe of DeVoe's Rainbow Orchards.

The farm was originally bought by his Grampa Hatlee in 1896 as a dairy farm. His parents, Merritt & Margaret DeVoe planted the first apple trees in 1931 as part of their country family garden that slowly grew into a business.

Growing up, Lawrence enjoyed playing basketball, baseball, ice-skating and horseshoes. Life was on the farm and he often helped his parents with the many responsibilities of running a farm. Lawrence also joined his father riding his mail route for the Waterford Post Office. A young lady named Vaughn was on that route. She would eventually become Lawrence's wife. "I was 16 and she was 12. We've been together ever since," he reminisces.

The DeVoe family has always been open to innovations to improve the farm. In 1958 they heard about wind machines being used in the California orange groves and in the citrus groves in Florida. After looking into it, they decided to install one of the first wind



machines in the area in their own orchard. The wind machines are used to keep the orchards from freezing. Circulating the air, these machines bring the warm air back down while pushing the cold air up. This raises the temperature at least a degree or two, which often means the difference between losing a crop or successfully bringing it to maturity.

In 1960, they added new technology to the farm by installing one of the first controlled atmosphere rooms. At the time, there was only a handful across the state. Lawrence and Vaughn took over the farm in the late 1970's. They continued the tradition of looking for new ways to make the process better. They designed a bin with removable sides to make it easier to sort by hand. They also started picking by bin instead of by bushel box and installed a sorting machine. Vaughn was one of the first in the Capital Region to start making fruit baskets and she baked bread and pies at home to sell at the store until they were able to build a commercial kitchen.





Over the years, Lawrence and Vaughn had 10 children and they all participated in the farm activities. Four of the children still work on the farm today. Increasing regulations have made it harder and harder for small farms to stay in business. The regulations were really created for large conglomerate farms, but the small farms still need to comply. This has forced many farms to diversify – DeVoe’s included. “We are like the old General Store,” says Lawrence. “The place where neighbors meet neighbors to pick up the mail and get some groceries. We have a bakery, post office, U-Haul, sheds, ice cream shop, farm stand with fresh homegrown fruits and veggies, and gift baskets.” This is in addition to their 70+ acres of apple orchards and vegetable crops.

The post office is one of the smallest they know of, but they service customers seven days a week from 9am-6pm and can do almost everything a traditional post office does. The DeVoes added on to their services this summer by providing U-Haul rentals and are now working on tearing out and replanting some of the orchards with new varieties. Lawrence says the farm has continued to evolve over the years, both with opportunities that happened to come their way, but also with the ability to capitalize on the interests

and talents of their family members, like his daughter, Lynn. Lynn opened the popular ice cream shop, Rainbow Delights, which also offers other foods like hamburgers & hot dogs, sausage or steak sandwiches, meatball subs, Panini’s, salads, kids’ meals, as well as salt potatoes, fries, onion rings and more, along with the usual fun ice cream treats.

The family is also very involved in the community. They are all members of the Masonic community and Lawrence was awarded the Dedicated Service Award from the Masonic Grand Lodge of NY in 2013. He has also served the Town of Halfmoon in various capacities for over 30 years.

He was originally asked to be the farm representative to the Town Zoning Committee. They then asked him to take a seat on the new Planning Board as that was being developed. His involvement continued until he eventually retired as the Town Supervisor. “It was important to me to be a part of the process that developed a plan that would guide the town as it grew. It was my way of participating in my community,” he says.

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Their family has continued to grow over the years and their 10 children have now expanded to 31 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren to date. Number 15 is due in December. They also have two farm dogs – Lady & Ruxin – who are customer favorites and can be found throughout the farm to greet their neighbors. The DeVoes are passionate about the farm and their community and are always looking for ways to give back. They are grateful for what they have accomplished over the years and look forward to seeing the members of the community that have now become family every day. Lawrence shares his gratitude: “My greatest accomplishment was the day my wife married me. I couldn’t have done any of this without her by my side. We have grown and changed significantly over the years and it is important to know that it is because WE have accomplished it together. Our customers and employees become a part of our extended family. We love chatting with them, learning about their families, celebrating their successes and



Joy DeVoe serving the community

mourning their losses. Please get to know your local farmer because we would love to get to know you!” ■

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