

Original Joe's

An Essay

Presented to

The California Pioneers

of Santa Clara County

by

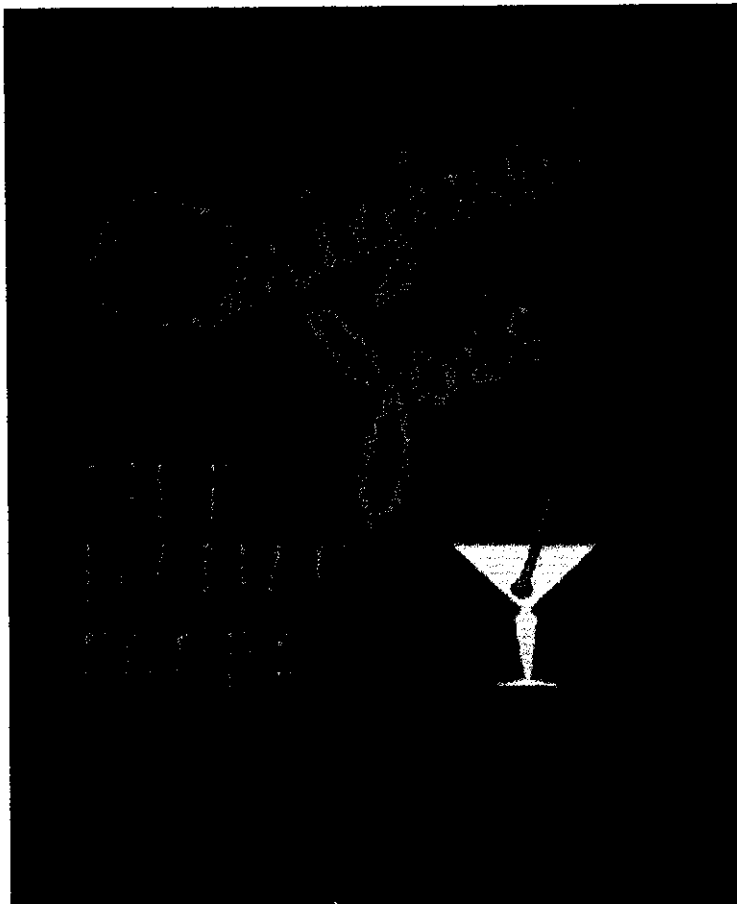
Brenda Munoz
1060 Lick Ave.
San Jose Ca, 95110
(408) 993-0516

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Introduction

For the past forty-six years Original Joe's has been a San Jose landmark. Since the day of the grand opening on May 24, 1954, Original Joe's has consistently offered delicious food and plentiful portions at reasonable prices with excellent service. Celebrities and local citizens alike have enjoyed the fine dining experience at Original Joe's. People always wonder if the name Joe's actually came from a Joe that was in the family, but the truth is that there was never a Joe's involved in the naming of the restaurant. The owners simply chose the name because it seemed very Italian.

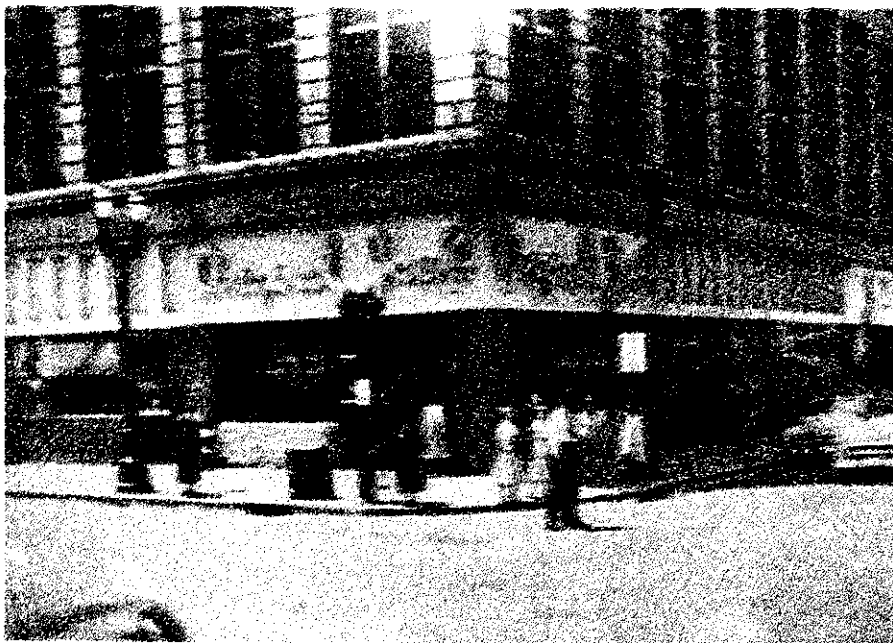


Location

Original Joe's is currently located at 301 South First Street, San Jose CA 95113. The restaurant is located in the heart of San Jose, downtown. Back in the 1950's and 1960's, downtown San Jose was a thriving commercial center. People went shopping, went to the movies, the theatre, and J.C. Penny's which closed quite late. All of the other restaurants in the downtown area closed fairly early, Original Joe's was the only restaurant that remained open until 1:30 A.M. It was also the only cocktail lounge around. That was one of the reasons why Original Joe's was very busy all of the time. The advantages to the location were that the restaurant was surrounded by other businesses such as shops, movie theatres and conventions which helped lure in customers. The location was also perfect since downtown San Jose is very popular among tourists, who are attracted to Original Joe's for dinner. In 1977, the building of the Center Of The Performing Arts and the Light Rail Station helped draw in even more people. Original Joe's is now located near many famous and very important buildings such as the Convention Center, The Tech Museum, The Civic Auditorium, The Martin Luther King Jr. Main Library, and the Sainte Claire Hotel among many others. Original Joe's is open every day from 9:00 A.M.-1:30 A.M.



Original Joe's on Sunday April 1, 2000



Original Joe's in 1956

History

Original Joe's was established on May 24, 1954; however, the building in which Original Joe's is currently located was built in 1925. It was built by a very well known San Jose developer by the name of T.S. Montgomery. T.S. Montgomery was the owner of the Montgomery hotel which is also located downtown. Before the building became known as Original Joe's, it used to be a very exclusive dress shop by the name of Appleton's where only the very wealthy would buy their clothes. Later on, Appletons closed their dress shop and the location was rented by Original Joe's. In 1953, Anthony Caramagno, Otto Tortore, and Louis Rocca, were looking for a location where they would be able to establish their restaurant. Louis Rocca was looking for a location where he could have a restaurant which he would give to his son. Louis wanted to give his son Babe a restaurant because Louis Rocca already had an Original Joe's in San Francisco (which he invested in right after the stock market crash) and he wanted his son to go into the business also. As the men were walking through downtown San Jose, they came upon the building. The men looked at the inside of the building and they thought it was a good place to have a restaurant.

They were very impressed with the building because of the size, the location and the very large basement which would be very convenient. As soon as they saw the location and the reasonable price for lease, they decided to rent the building.¹

The owners rented the building all the way to the coffee shop. Original Joe's shared it's building with many other businesses. In the upstairs part of the building there used to be a jewelry repair shop, a doctor's office, and a dentist's office. It took Anthony, Otto, and Louis ten years to finish paying off the building. In 1966, Original Joe's was finally theirs. The owners of Original Joe's wanted to have a restaurant like the one they had in San Francisco which was established in 1937. The owner of the Original Joe's in San Francisco was Louis Rocca. The Original Joe's in San Francisco was more elegant than the one in San Jose; it was a very high-class restaurant with gold plates and the finest champagne.

The Grand Opening

Original Joe's first opened May 24, 1954, at 11:00 A.M. The line for people waiting to enter extended down the block on South First Street. The mayor of San Jose was present at the opening and was there to shake the owners hands.²

The opening of Original Joe's was a great event and looked like the premiere of a movie because many people were there. Both ladies and gentlemen were dressed in their finest clothes. The people in the South Bay Area were very happy to have an Italian restaurant in downtown San Jose and were happy to have a restaurant similar to the Original Joe's in San Francisco. Since the Original Joe's in San Francisco was famous for its elegance, good food, and service many people in San Jose were very ecstatic and thrilled.

Ambience

Original Joe's has a very classic, elegant, fifties look. On the outside, the style of the building is very classic with detailed lions on the very top and with its many designs covering the building. On the inside of the restaurant the booths have polished wood with glass covering each booth to give the customers some privacy. The lighting inside the restaurant is very dim in order to provide a comforting look. The decorations are unique and antique. Around the restaurant are located gold antique vases with very finely detail. There are also statues surrounded by plants which gives the restaurant a very classic touch. Since 1960, two very large black antique vases with various flowers painted on them have drawn the customers attention. They have great value because these vases have survived through many fires and earthquakes.

The style of the restaurant is identical to the Original Joe's in San Francisco. Although the Original Joe's in San Jose wasn't as elegant as the one in San Francisco, it was still known for its fine dining. One of the things that makes Original Joe's so unique is their counters. You can be enjoying your meal while seeing the chefs cook the food right in front of you. Original Joe's also has a bar in the back of the restaurant where people enjoy watching games while they are drinking their beverage.

Current Owners

Otto Tortore (the former owner of Original Joe's) died in December 1972, at age sixty-three from pneumonia. The current owners of Original Joe's are Brad Rocca and Matt Rocca, who are sons of Louis Rocca Jr. (Babe). Original Joe's has been in the Rocca family for almost forty-five years. Brad Rocca still remembers waiting on tables at age twelve. It gave him experience and it also gave him something to do over the summer. "Both Brad and Matt Rocca went to Markham Middle School and Bellarmine College Prep. They later graduated from Santa Clara University."³ People always ask if the owners of Original Joe's have own any other restaurants around California. The answer to that is no, they only have the Original Joe's in San Jose.

Wait Staff

Original Joe's has a staff of very dedicated waiters. David Haff was one of the most important waiters at Original Joe's and started working when Original Joe's first opened. David Haff was a very comical man who added a sense of humor into every situation. He was always so cheerful and happy with a big pleasant smile on his face. David Haff always enjoyed working in Original Joe's because he got to meet many new and different people. David Haff was the life of the restaurant and everyone, including the customers, loved him. When Haff waited on tables, he would be carrying a coffee pot and would pretend to spill it and drop it on the customer. The customer would get frightened but would later realize that the pot was empty and that it was one of David's many practical jokes. Another one of David's jokes was that whenever another waiter dropped their dishes, David and others people would stand by the waiter and start clapping so that they would draw attention to the clumsy waiter which would get him very embarrassed. Everyone knew how David was so they did not take offense to his pranks. They would actually laugh about it later on. David retired when he was sixty-five years of age on the day that Original Joe's celebrated its 38th year anniversary on May 24, 1994. David had been working in Original Joe's for a very long time.

Unfortunately, David passed away February 28, 1997, in his house in Santa Clara. David died of Emphysema lung cancer spread too his liver. He died at age sixty seven.³

Another group of famous waiters are the Munoz Brothers. The Munoz brothers have been working in Original Joe's ever since they were very young. There are four Munoz Brothers by the names of Camerino Munoz, Eliodoro Munoz, David Munoz, and the youngest Arturo Munoz. All of the Munoz Brothers started out doing very low paying jobs and kept working very hard to earn their way up to the top. Camerino Munoz first started working in Original Joe's in March 1976. As a dishwasher he then later became a lineman and after that, he became a busboy. He is currently working as a waiter which he really enjoys doing. "Camerino says he enjoys working in Original Joe's because of his many companions."⁵ Eliodoro Munoz started working in Original Joe's on September 1979. Eliodoro first started working as a Lineman, then later became a busboy, and is now currently working as a waiter. "Eliodoro says he enjoys working in Original Joe's because

he gets to meet new people and also because he likes serving people.”⁶ David Munoz started working in Original Joe’s in July 1980. David entered Original Joe’s as a dishwasher and later became a busboy. David said that being a busboy was probably the hardest job that he had ever worked in because he had to clear the table and carry all of the dishes which were very heavy. David Munoz now currently works as a Waiter where he orders the customers food and serves it to them. “David says that he enjoys working in Original Joe’s because even though the work is hard the crew in Original Joe’s has become like a second home to him.”⁷ The youngest of the Munoz brothers is Arturo Munoz. Arturo started working in Original Joe’s in August 1989 as a busboy. He is still working as a busboy and he is working really hard to move up to a higher position. “Arturo says that he is very content with his job because everyone treats him very well and he also says the restaurant shows a very happy atmosphere all of the time.”⁸ The Munoz brothers have no intention of leaving the restaurant any time soon. Brad Rocca (the owner of Original Joe’s) always asks the Munoz brothers if they have any more relatives because he says that he is very impressed with their hard work and commitment that he really wants more Munoz in his restaurant.

Original Joe’s has some waitresses just as it has waiters. There are more waiters than waitresses working in Original Joe’s because the women only serve at on the counters at lunchtime. During lunchtime the bar serves food as well as drinks and the women are the ones working there. The female work crew also consist of the cashiers. The women love working as cashiers because they get to meet and talk to people and because it’s also a good job that doesn’t require much walking. The cashiers get to know the waiters so well that they regard themselves like brothers and sisters.

Veal Parmigiana



Parmigiana, a Joe's favorite, is breaded veal covered in Italian tomato sauce and cheese.

Foods

Original Joe's offers a wide variety of foods from hamburgers to Veal Cutlet Milanese. The prices range anywhere from \$4.00-\$25.00 per dish. The restaurant serves breakfasts, lunches and dinners. The most preferred breakfast dish is the baked ham and eggs, which is only served on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sunday and it costs \$9.95. The most preferred entrees by the customers are the Veal Parmigiana, the Prime Rib, (which is only served on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays) and the Veal Scallopine Sec with mushrooms. Both the Veal Parmigiana and the Veal Scallopine Sec cost \$17.95 per dish, but the Prime Rib costs \$ 23.95. Original Joe's uses real meat and not any imitational meat like some other restaurants do. When a customer orders veal, they give it to them and they don't try to replace the meat with pork or any other kind of meat. There are many kinds of chicken dishes ranging from Charcoal -broiled Chicken Breast to Chicken Piccata. The prices for the chicken plates range from \$13.95- \$14.95. Original Joe's also has a large variety of Seafood. The most popular seafood dish on the menu is the Golden Fried Scallops which costs \$18.95 per dish. Some of the lunch specialties are baked lasagna, barbeque lamb, braised short ribs and beef stew, just to name a few. Prices for these dishes range from \$7.95-\$11.95. The lunch specialties are only served until 5:00P.M. Another thing that the Italian restaurant is known for is their pastas. The Pasta in Original Joe's comes in different varieties. Some of the Pasta meals are Spaghetti with Meat and Mushroom sauce, Raviolis, Mostacioli, and Scampi with Linguine. The prices range from \$8.95-\$18.95. Many people also order dessert which include Spumoni, Cheesecake, Tiramisu, Ice cream, Gelato, and Chocolate Mousse Torte. The prices of these fine desserts range from \$1.50-\$ 4.95.



The New York Steak is also one of Joe's favorites.

Beverages

Original Joe's has a wide variety of beverages from fine, expensive, wines to Sodas. Some of the White Wines in Original Joe's are Sauvignon Blanc- Kenwood, Chardonnay- Grgich Hills, and the Pinot Grigio- Alois Lageder (Italy), just to name a few. Original Joe's serves very fine Red Wines. These wines consist of Zinfandel- David Bruce, Merlot- Sterling, Cabernet Sauvignon- Caymus . The Red Wines range from \$14.95- \$79.95. The most expensive Red Wine is the Cabernet Sauvignon- Caymus, which is \$79.95 for a full bottle. Original Joe's also has Champagnes. The Champagnes that Original Joe's serves are: Korbel Extra Dry which is \$24.95 for a full bottle and \$12.95 for a half-full bottle and Mumm's Extra Dry (which is imported from France). Mumm's Extra Dry Champagne is \$22.95 for a half- full bottle and \$44.95 for a full bottle. Original Joe's also serves Wine by the glass which is \$3.50 and Champagne by the glass which is \$5.00. The Cocktail lounge is always proud to serve Black & White Scotch, Gordon's extra Dry Gin, Wolfschmidt Vodkam A.W. Brandy, Baccardi Light Rum, Martini & Sweet and Dry Vermouths. The Cocktail Lounge is really popular in Original Joe's because it is a place where people talk with their friends and just relax while watching a game on the televisions and drinking some of their favorite beverages.

Problems

Original Joe's has dealt with many problems during its existence. In 1972, there was a fire that burned the top of the building. The fire was started in the kitchen and then it moved to the upper part of the building. The blaze was caused by the Barbeque Pit in the kitchen and since the fan was sucking up all of the fire it caused the blaze to move higher.

While the fire was going on in the restaurant, the people that were dining in Original Joe's did not panic one bit, they simply asked that if the blaze got anywhere near downstairs to warn them. It took many fire fighters to fight the blaze several floors above. After the fire, the workers went to look at the upstairs and it was destroyed.⁹

Unfortunately, there was also another fire in Original Joe's not too long ago. The fire was caused on June 24, 1995. The fire was started at 10:45 A.M and was caused by the chefs who were preparing the Barbeque Pit. They had accidentally mixed grease with fire, which made the flames go up even higher until the chimney flu caught on fire.

Unfortunately, by 11:30A.M. there was already \$100,000 worth of damage.⁹ The flames that caused the blaze were as high as five stories through the restaurant office building, just like the first fire that Original Joe's encountered in 1972. The fire spread to the storage room on top of the restaurant building, but an hour later the fire finally settled.

Original Joe's almost experienced another fire on Monday March 20, 2000. The fire almost happened because of the same reason as the previous fires. The chimney flue in the kitchen was sucking up the flames causing the fire to spread even more. Luckily the staff saw what was happening and one of the men rapidly grabbed a fire extinguisher to put off the fire. The flames were so big that the fire extinguisher wasn't able to put the fire off. The rest of the crew grabbed different types of liquids to try and calm the fire. One man grabbed milk while another grabbed water to try and stop the fire. Fortunately, the fire didn't cause great damage to the restaurant as had the previous fires. It was a relatively small accident and it just made the workers in Original Joe's be more cautious about what's going on.

Some of the most current problems that Original Joe's is experiencing is that the restaurant needs a bigger staff. The owners of Original Joe's are looking for a very committed staff that will show up to work the days that they have to work.

Success

Since Original Joe's is a very popular place for many people, there have been many celebrities such as George Bush, Eleanor Roosevelt, Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, and Willie Nelson who have dined at the restaurant.¹¹

The celebrities that show up regularly range from George Bush (former president of the United States) to Steve Young (quarterback of the Forty-niners). Many celebrities enjoy the good service put on by the waiters and the very delicious food that is served. Original Joe's is a very flexible place. Attire varies between casual and elegant. People in Original Joe's dine for business as well as social purposes.

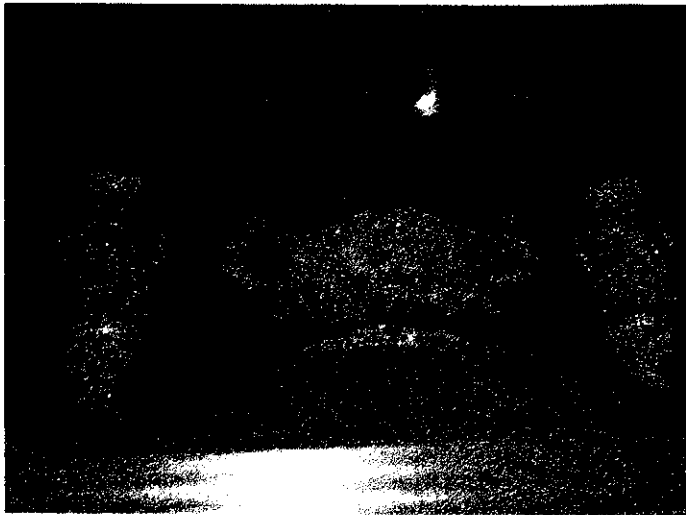
Original Joe's has struggled to become one of the best restaurants in the Bay Area. Original Joe's is known for its great service and its excellent food. Customers are "regulars" at Original Joe's. The restaurant is especially busy on weekends because of the various activities that go on in the downtown area. People prefer to make reservations before hand in order to avoid waits as walk-ins sometimes wait hours to get a table. Original Joe's has been one of the most prosperous restaurants in Northern California.

The current owners of Original Joe's are planning to restore the old offices in the upper levels as they have not been touched since the fire in 1995. In the meantime, they plan to offer the same good food and friendly service as always.

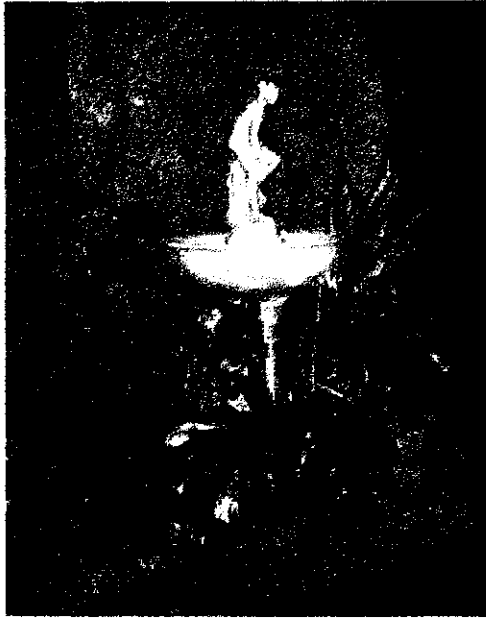
Interior Decorations



These vases are antiques and made of gold and porcelain. They are displayed towards the back of the restaurant by the cocktail lounge.



Decorations

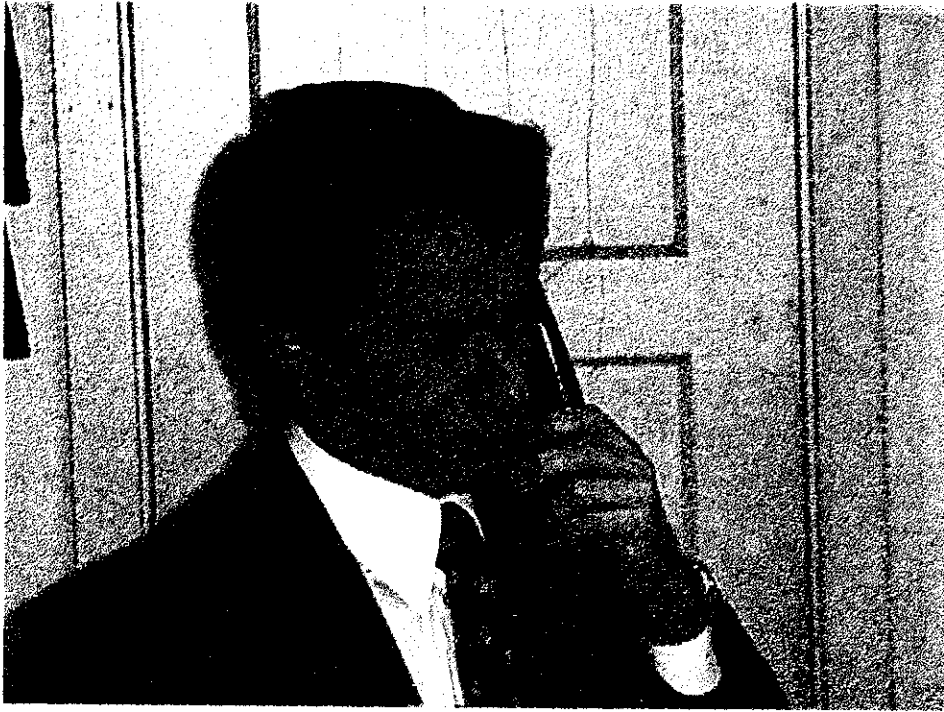


This statue is located in the back of the restaurant, where the cocktail lounge is.

The Statue was added to make the restaurant look more elegant.



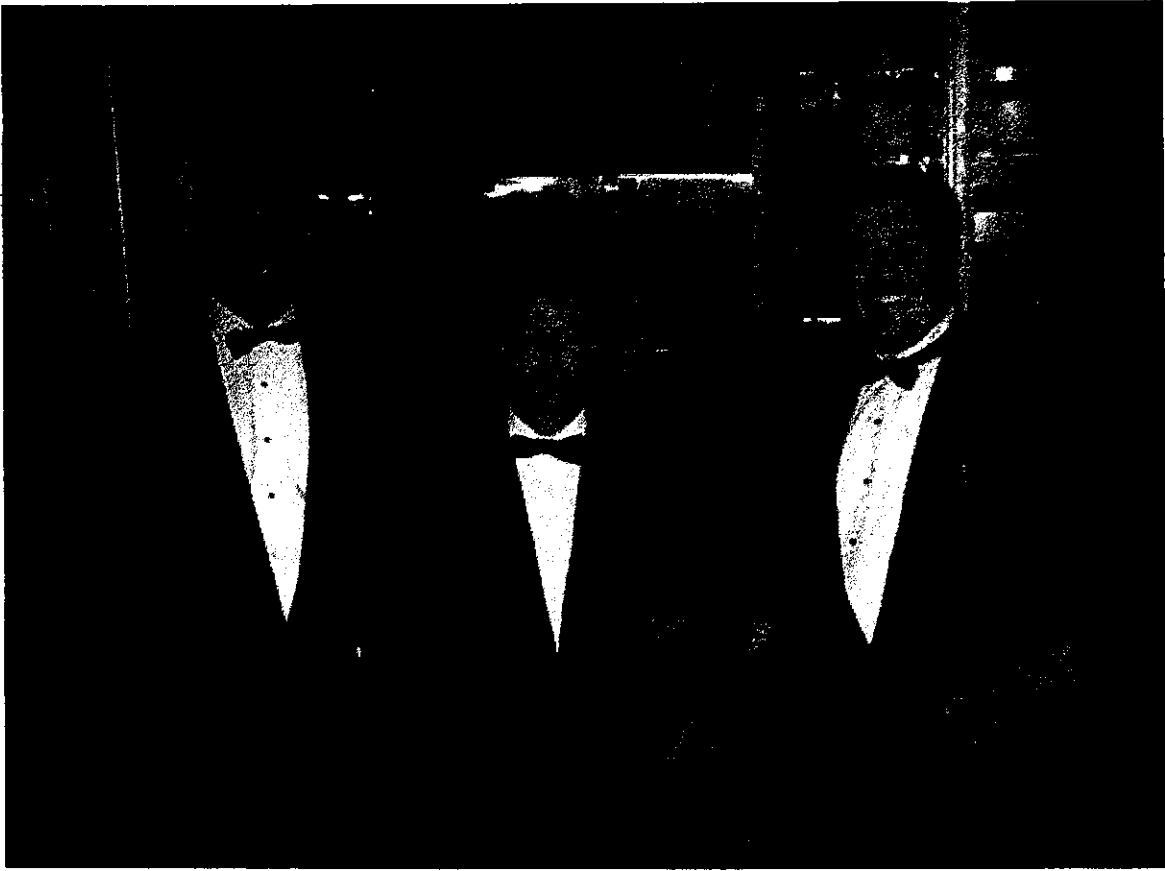
This is a picture of a very special vase that has been in Original Joe's since 1960. There are two of these vases around the restaurant. They have survived many things such as earthquakes and fires.



Here is a picture of the oldest brother Matt Rocca, who currently owns Original Joe's.

Below is a picture of the youngest brother Brad Rocca who is also the owner of Original Joe's.





The Munoz brothers smile for a picture. (left to right) David Munoz, Arturo Munoz and Camerino Munoz. Missing from the picture is Eliodoro Munoz.

Below, is a picture of Darlene Salamoni cashier at Original Joe's.





Roger Gomez, the chef, prepare the delicious food that the customers enjoy eating.

Cocktail Lounge



The Bartender , Bijan Sanjay, fixing up drinks for the customers.



Manuel Hernandez working at the salad bar.



The chefs preparing the oven.



The chef is preparing some delicious spaghetti.



The picture above shows customers dinning in the counters at Joe's.



This picture shows the fine waiters dressed up in tuxedos, serving the customers.



adies and Gentlemen waiting to dine in Original Joe's. This picture was taken in 1956.

End Notes

¹ Terry Christensen, Charlene Duval, Ellen Garboske, Mary Jo Ignoffo and Phil Grasser, Reflections of the Past, (USA: Heritage Media Corporation, 1996), p. 424.

² Ibid. , p.424.

³ Rocca, Brad, interviewed by Brenda Munoz, February 23, 2000.

⁴ "Dave Haff, manager who amused Original Joe's diners for 38 years", Mercury News, February 28, 1997.

⁵ Munoz, Camerino interviewed by Brenda Munoz April 1, 2000.

⁶ Munoz, Eliodoro, interviewed by Brenda Munoz, April 1, 2000.

⁷ Munoz, David, interviewed by Brenda Munoz, April 1, 2000.

⁸ Munoz, Arturo, interviewed by Brenda Munoz, April 1, 2000.

⁹ "Original Joe's Plans Re-Opening after Blaze", Mercury News, June 24, 1995.

¹⁰ Ibid. , p.424.

¹¹ . Christensen, Op. Cit. , p. 424.

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Willow Glen High School

Advisor: Mrs. Kathryn C. Philp