

Guest Column: The Faces of Hospitality & Tourism

As you are probably aware, tourism is a top economic driver for San Juan County. Visitors “import” new dollars and sales tax, which benefit small businesses, non-profits like museums and farmers markets, government programs, and residents as these dollars circulate throughout our island communities. This series of columns will help put faces to the hospitality industry – restauranteurs, innkeepers, shopkeepers, tour captains, and other entrepreneurs who make our communities so unique and vibrant.

A grocery store probably isn't the first business that comes to mind when thinking about tourism, but most visitors to Orcas Island pick up supplies at Island Market. Jacob Linnes' family opened Templin's Fair Co. in 1897, the first iteration of Island Market, so the grocery business is in his blood. Orcas is, and has been, home for his entire life, even during the time he moved to Seattle to work for a larger company. As he says, “I didn't always know I would join the family business, but once the option became a reality, my wife and I jumped at the opportunity to come home and reconnect with the island. Growing up in a retail business, I have always been exposed to visitors and I find that I get an energy boost when they are here experiencing our community. I especially love seeing them visit in the winter as I feel they get to truly experience the uniqueness of what our island offers.”

How does tourism benefit the Islands?

“The stories I've heard from my parents and grandparents go back 127 years and most of them are about people. Some long-time folks, some newcomers, and some visitors. All of them are what keep our Island balanced and allow us to evolve in a way that keeps up with the current needs of the community. I love the energy and life visitors bring to the island and being able to share our culture with them.” Jacob is inspired by the small business owners that ebb and flow with the island's economics. “From retail to construction, and everything in between, business owners work so hard and take pride in their craft. Their passion, planning and endurance to make it from season to season is inspiring.”

Jacob and his team at Island Market are always looking for opportunities to meet the needs of the community— “our Taphouse (micro restaurant inside our store) is something I'm very proud of as we are able to provide high quality food at a lower price point. This was an area people asked us about and to be able to deliver feels good. Also, we are very excited about a new partnership that will bring a nursery back to the land next door. We are planning to be open in the spring and with the help of a new partner we will have an amazing new space. Stay tuned as that is just a glimpse of what is coming. Like a spyhop as opposed to a breach.” This sense of community has led us through uncharted waters before and will get us through again.

