



# The Columbian

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### Ridgefield Junction Neighborhood Market a good catch

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

BY JOSE PAUL CORONA, Columbian staff writer

Doris Girt offered to take her friend and co-worker anywhere she wanted for a birthday lunch.

"I know just the place," Marion Swendsen said.

The women, who work in Vancouver, recently drove to the Pacific Northwest Best Fish Company in Ridgefield on their lunch break.

Girt, of Vancouver, had no idea where she was going.

"She was very pleasantly surprised," Swendsen said.

She didn't know the place existed, said Swendsen, who lives in Yacolt.

Chances are Girt isn't the only Clark County resident who has no idea that the small Ridgefield business sells fresh fish and seafood.

The business, which opened in 2001, is along a sparsely populated stretch of Northeast 10th Avenue in Ridgefield.

The fish market and cafe are surrounded by farmland and expensive ranch-style homes. Plenty of people have driven past the business while trying to get to Interstate 5.

The business looks "like it should be on a wharf somewhere," said Roger McLeskey, who lives near the business, which is in the Ridgefield Junction neighborhood.

"The building is unique, it makes for a nice fish store," he said.

That's intentional, said Kelly Beckwith, the manager and co-owner of the market and cafe.

Old crab pots are hung outside the entrance to the store and docking ropes decorate the building. Beckwith said he wants the store to look like it belongs on the coast.

The retail store and fish-processing operation are housed in a former berry warehouse that was occupied by Robinson Cold Storage.

When Beckwith decided to open the business, he thought Ridgefield would be a great location. The Robinson facility ended up being the perfect spot. It had plenty of space and there was room for growth, he said.

Beckwith, along with his partner and uncle, Dan Evans, own the old structure along with a nearby house and some land. The house serves as office space.

County officials allowed the business to open and operate because it took up residence in the old berry facility. It has a similar commercial use, said Marian Anderson, with the county's Community Development Department.

Inside the store, red snapper, salmon, Chilean sea

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### Pacific Northwest Best Fish Company

24415 N.E. 10th Ave., Ridgefield.

Call 360-887-4268 or visit [www.pacificnwbest.com](http://www.pacificnwbest.com).



Marion Swendsen, left, and Doris Girt celebrate Swendsen's birthday at the Pacific Northwest Best Fish Company in Ridgefield. (BEN CAMPBELL/The Columbian)



Pacific Northwest Best Fish Company is housed in a facility formerly occupied by a defunct berry processor. (BEN CAMPBELL/The Columbian)



A motorist approaches the drive-through window at the Pacific Northwest Best Fish Company. The cafe, which also doubles as a coffee bar, is housed in a building the size of a large construction trailer. (BEN CAMPBELL/The Columbian)

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bass and sashimi grade ahi tuna are surrounded by fresh clams and mussels.

Spicy crab dip and Cajun crawfish pasta salad also sit in the store's display case. Busy shoppers who don't have time to prepare the fish can pick up something such as freshly made crab cakes. Customers can even pick up a live crab.

All the seafood is brought in daily. The fish, and other food items, are all prepared on site, Beckwith said.

The business also supplies New Seasons and Whole Foods markets.

Many customers never make it inside the seafood store, sticking to the cafe. Swendsen frequents both, and stops in at least once a month.

"I just love their fish tacos," she said.

Mahi mahi or grilled halibut are the fish taco options. The halibut fish and chips are also popular, as are the clam strips. The house clam chowder is also a favorite, said cafe employee Ashley Niehaus.

The small cafe only seats eight people, but outdoor seating is available. Many people simply order from the drive-up window, Niehaus said.

Regulars make up most her clientele. The Battle Ground resident said she recognizes many of the voices from when they place phone orders.

The location of the business is somewhat surprising, but appreciated, McLeskey said.

Ridgefield doesn't have any supermarkets, so the store is definitely needed, said Orme Kellett.

Kellett, a Ridgefield resident and barista at nearby Lava Java, said he eats at the cafe about once a week.

"I think it's great," he said.

Swendsen also enjoys the cafe, but she does have one criticism.

She'd like it to "get a little bigger."

Lee Wells, president of the Ridgefield Junction Neighborhood Association, would like to see the cafe expand into a full-service restaurant. It would give employees of the nearby regional distribution center for Dollar Tree Stores a place to eat.

That's something that Beckwith is thinking about.

The business has seen an increase in sales since United Natural Foods opened a warehouse and distribution center nearby, he said.

On a recent morning Beckwith greeted an employee of the organic food distributor. They chatted for a few minutes and she left with four coffee drinks.

She comes in regularly, he said.

With the growth in the area it's not surprising to see why Beckwith is thinking about expanding.

"They do pretty good trade on the weekend," McLeskey said.

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