

Blessings in a Cup

Orthodox priest from Goldendale turns his love of coffee into a roasting business

By Jeanie Senior

Open the door to Father Michael Dunaway's coffee roastery—aptly named Father Michael's Coffee—north of Goldendale and the rich aroma of roasting coffee beans rolls out in almost-visible waves.

Wearing the full-length black cassock that is standard garb for an Orthodox priest, Michael checks the beans' doneness via a small scoop at the front of the blue roasting machine.

In a few minutes he judges the beans to be perfectly roasted,



Orthodox priest and self-proclaimed coffee fanatic Michael Dunaway tests coffee beans to see if they are roasted.

and releases them to pour into a cooling tray, to be bagged when they are fully cool.

"All coffee needs to rest after you roast it," he says.

The walls around the airy roasting building are lined with bins of coffee beans waiting to be roasted. An icon of Archangel Michael overlooks the Diedrich roaster.

The roastery is a relatively new venture for Michael, who moved with his wife, Joanna, and their four children from Alaska to Goldendale 12 years ago to serve the sisters at St. John's Greek Orthodox Monastery.

He says on the business' website, www.fathermichaels.com, "I may be the only Orthodox priest roasting coffee and possibly the first Orthodox priest you've ever heard of." Noting that he's been blessed to serve the nuns at St. John's, he adds, "I want to pass that blessing onto you: from my hand to your cup. Who doesn't need a little blessing now and then?"

Moving to Goldendale to be near St. John's fulfilled Michael's long-held desire to be involved with a monastery. He calls the abbess who leads the 22 nuns at St. John's "a woman of great kindness. Her vision for God and for people and for the life of the world is just wonderful. That's what drew me to come. The minute I visited that monastery I said, 'I want to be here.' It's a remarkable place."

Michael's roots are deep in Kentucky. He says his family helped Daniel Boone settle Boonesborough but he lived in Alaska for 35 years. Raised Methodist, he became Orthodox in Alaska.

"That's Orthodox country," he says. "Being settled by Russians, the DNA of the people is Orthodox."

He was ordained to the priesthood 18 years ago, after attending St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York.

Before moving to Washington, Michael was a priest in the town of Wasilla.

"The cold and the long nights in Alaska were wearing on us," he says. "But mostly it was the opportunity to serve the sisters here at St. John's."

He used to work as a home builder. "But when that market fell out, my love for coffee took over," he says. "I have to support myself somehow, and I've always been passionate about coffee." Actually, he confesses, "I'm a little bit fanatic about coffee."

Coffee-roasting equipment is expensive. But Michael's first purchase was less costly than expected.



Michael and his son Seraphim go through steps of the cupping process.

“Traveling to Alaska for the unfortunate death of my mother a couple of years back, I happened to walk into a shop in the middle of nowhere that had three huge roasters sitting on his floor,” Michael says. “I joked, ‘Why don’t you sell one?’”

The owner responded by offering the Diedrich for what Michael believes was probably at least half the price of what it would cost elsewhere. Shipping the half-ton unit to Washington added \$300 to the cost.

Michael describes the process of importing as “trying to buy coffee as a little guy—trying to buy good coffee before the big guys buy it all up.”

Michael and his youngest son, Seraphim, whom he calls “the last one left in the nest, our unexpected joy and my right hand,” choose coffee beans by cupping. He buys sample lots of beans, roasts them in a small roaster, and portions 12 grams of ground coffee and 6 ounces of water to a series of cups.

After the grounds steep for four minutes, the tasters break the crust in the cup and breathe the aroma. They stir and smell, then remove the grounds and taste the coffee a spoonful at a time. Cupping is about aroma, taste, fragrance and flavor. Michael says he has learned to trust Seraphim’s ability.

“I’m picking out the coffees generally based on the ones he chooses,” Michael says. “He’s never picked a loser.”

The roastery sells coffees by origin, blend and roast. The Goldendale Blend, a mix of South and Central American

coffees with the addition of a sturdy Indonesian flare and a hint of a uniquely aged India Monsooned Malabar, is a favorite.

“It’s full-bodied, what you would expect from Goldendale-ites—a nice conservative blend with not too much of anything weirding you out,” Michael says.

Sulawesi is the biggest seller. “It’s really good, just delicious. There’s a lot going on in it—mushroom, earth tones, a heavy body. It tends to be on the darker side.”

Michael used to drink coffee with half and half. “But once we got into roasting, started doing our own work, really, honestly, you don’t need it,” he says. “There’s no bitterness, and it is unnecessary. I don’t like masking the coffee anymore.”

The roastery boasts a fancy Italian espresso machine. Michael whips up espresso drinks for visitors, “focusing on traditional drinks, cappuccinos that are 6.5 ounces, not 16 ounces.” The machine was a gift from family friends.

In the summer the farmers markets in the Tri-Cities are their biggest venture. Father Michael’s Roastery is the only coffee vendor at the Richland farmers market, which boasts about 100 vendors. “We have a large name over there,” Michael says. ■

Father Michael’s Coffee is available by mail order, at the gift shop at St. John’s and at the Goldendale IGA. Solutions Computer stores in The Dalles and Hood River, both owned by the Dunaways’ son Jacob, carry Michael’s coffee. It is on the menu at the Glass Onion and the Cornerstone coffee kiosk in Goldendale, and at Brama Cafe in The Dalles.