

Jewell's Bleu Cheese Dressing--Handcrafted (and Available) in Vernonia

Jewell Halsey has been making Bleu Cheese Dressing for family and friends for years. Many of those lucky recipients of Jewell's heavenly creations have encouraged her to try to process, market and distribute it on a retail level-- to turn it into a local cottage industry. And now she has.

"It's really exciting and I have no idea where it's going to end up," says Halsey, who resides in Vernonia.

Jewell's Bleu Cheese Dressing, the first and, for right now, only product in Halsey's business-- Jewell's Heavenly Creations-- is now available for you to buy and enjoy. You can find it on the shelves at the Vernonia Sentry Market and Bales Thriftway in Portland. Hopefully, it will soon be in even more locations.

What makes Jewell's Bleu Cheese Dressing so special? First is the taste. For those of you not crazy about chunky bleu cheese dressing, then Jewell's is for you. Halsey's dressing is subtly flavored with bleu cheese and it's creamy-- it's almost more of a ranch-style dressing.

Second is the quality-- Halsey uses high-quality and fresh ingredients, and she doesn't use fillers to thin it down.

Third is versatility. Not only is it great on salads and as a dipping sauce for wings, fries and veggies; you can also use it as a spread on grilled cheese and other sandwiches and on burgers. Halsey says she uses it in or on omelets, as a spread on meats and chicken, and on pizza. Halsey told me about a local little girl who sent her a note and told her that she eats the dressing on her peanut butter sandwiches-- she takes it

to school with her in a little container in her lunch. "Her parents told me that she eats vegetables now, too," says Halsey.

And fourth-- it's local. Jewell's is an Oregon-produced product; purchasing it helps stimulates the local and state economy.



Halsey is originally from Cottage Grove, graduated from Forest Grove High School, and moved to Vernonia with her former husband, Mike Pihl, to start Pihl Logging. She lived in Vernonia for twelve years, moved to Portland, and recently relocated back to Vernonia. In 2007, she lost her job at the start of the economic downturn and is currently working in the restaurant business. "I think that's what inspired

me to do this [the dressing], just getting back in the food business," explains Halsey. "I've been a foody since the day I was born-- my whole family loves to eat and we just create things all the time."

Halsey says she bounced ideas off co-workers at the restaurant where she works and started trying sample batches with her daughter, Lindsey, and her family. Eventually, she hit upon a recipe that she felt worked. And in January of 2010, Halsey decided that she was ready to set some goals and move from talking about starting her business to actually doing it. "I kept talking about it and how I wanted to sell it and my daughter Janis said, 'Come on, do it!'" Halsey worked through the process slowly, working with the Department of Agriculture to find out how to proceed. She initially processed her product in an established commercial kitchen in Tigard and sold her product at some small farmer's markets, including the Vernonia Open Air Market, last summer. She recently began renting the kitchen at the Vernonia Christian Church, a Department of Agriculture certified kitchen, to prepare batches.

"I'm kind of a baby-step person," says Jewell. She recently had to upgrade her labels for her retail

establishments to include a bar code and nutrition panel. "Now, I'm really ready to start marketing it," said Halsey.

She is already seeing success at the Vernonia Sentry Market-- the first delivery sold out very quickly and she already had to make a second delivery.

Halsey says that in addition to getting her dressing on the shelves in more locations, she is also receiving feedback and considering producing a chunky bleu cheese dressing and a larger size of her current product. She is also considering expanding her line with some other types of heavenly creations-- maybe a baked good or something else. "I'm a health nut and eating healthy is really important to me," she says. "But I'm going to take it slowly."

Halsey wanted to pass on a thank you to the folks at Riverhouse Dressing, who make vinegarett dressing at the Oregon coast. "They've been around for twenty years and they gave me a lot of wonderful tips about how to walk those baby steps and grow slowly," says Halsey. "They were wonderful."

For Halsey, marketing and selling her dressings is a dream come true. "It's already a success story to me because I followed through on this small goal and it's always been a passion of mine to do something in the food industry."

For more information about Jewell's Heavenly Creations, go to her Facebook page.



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