

Working At The Jell-O Gallery

by Lynne Belluscio

All of the folks who visit the Jell-O Gallery get a crash course in Jell-O history. Whether they take the tour with Ruth Harvie, Jim Delooze, Emily Graham, Caroline Bolin or Denise Deuthe, they learn that the Jell-O story is fascinating – often curious – and always more than they ever imagined. Here are some of the Jell-O facts that our visitors learn:

1. Jell-O is a gelatin dessert that was introduced by a carpenter, Pearle Bixby Wait, in 1897 in LeRoy. No one knows for sure why. It is believed that his wife May coined the name Jell-O.

2. After two years, and little success trying to sell his new dessert, Pearle Wait sold the rights to Jell-O for \$450 to a LeRoy businessman, Orator Woodward.

3. Frustrated by the lack of interest in the new product, Woodward offered Jell-O to his plant manager, Sam Nico, for \$35. The offer was declined.

4. By the time of his death in 1906, Woodward was able to build Jell-O into nearly a million-dollar-a-year business.

5. The Jell-O Girl was a real four-year old by the name of Elizabeth King. Her image was used on the box of Jell-O into the 1940s.

6. The first four flavors were lemon, orange, raspberry and strawberry. At one time other flavors included chocolate,

coffee, celery, cola, apple, and spiced tomato.

7. Famous artists, Norman Rockwell, Rose O’Neill, and Maxfield Parrish created Jell-O advertisements. There are 19 original paintings on exhibit in the Jell-O Gallery which were used in Jell-O advertising in the 1920s.

8. A Canadian doctor tested a bowl of Jell-O with an EEG machine and determined that the Jell-O produced brain waves that were identical to those of the human brain. This phenomenon was duplicated by the staff at St. Jerome Hospital in Batavia.

9. The Jell-O factory was located on North Street and it closed in 1964. The production of Jell-O was moved to Dover, Delaware. Some of the LeRoy employees moved to Dover at that time. Jell-O was not the largest employer in LeRoy at that time. Lapp Insulator employed almost twice as many people as Jell-O.

10. The highest per capita consumption of lime Jell-O is in Utah.

Here are the ten most frequently asked questions:

1. Do you have a rest room? The door on the left goes downstairs and you will find two rest rooms in the basement. While you’re

downstairs make sure you visit our transportation exhibit

2. Has Bill Cosby ever been here? Yes, he celebrated his 30th anniversary with Jell-O here, and posed with the 4th grade students for pictures.

3. Is Jell-O made from horses hooves? Nope and it never has been!

4. Where is a good place for lunch? The D & R Depot in a restored train station. Everything is home-made and the chicken pot pie actually has chunks of chicken you can see.

5. Why doesn’t Jell-O make pudding pops anymore? They do.

6. Do you sell brain molds? Yes. There is a basket of brains over by the golf shirts.

7. Will you take our picture with the cow? Sure. Say “Jell-O”

8. Is the LeRoy House open today? Our volunteer docents help keep the LeRoy House open. They usually open the house at 11:00 am.

9. Is there anything else in LeRoy that we can do? There’s an Underground Railroad self guided driving tour. And there are 80 barn quilts in the town and we have a map you can follow. And you can have your picture taken in front of the Statue of Liberty on the creek bank.

10. Why don’t you have Jell-O we can sample? It requires refrigeration and we don’t have a health permit to serve food.

If you think you could talk about Jell-O, and wouldn’t be intimidated by the questions people ask, and would enjoy meeting all the fascinating people who walk into the museum, we would like to hear from you. We are looking for a new gallery guide that would be willing to work two or three days a week. Give us a call at 768-7433 and ask for Lynne or Caroline. You can come in and fill out a job application and have an interview.




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