

Joe and Denise Rice came to Jackson in 1989 following the birth of their first child, Nicole. They were drawn here like so many of us by the beauty they encountered on their yearly ski vacations when Joe was still stationed in Hawaii with the Marines, flying fighter jets. It was during one of these ski trips that they saw Merry Piglets was for sale. At the time Merry Piglets was a summer-only business in Crabtree Corner. Having the urge to relocate and raise a family in a small mountain town, they bought Merry Piglets and moved to Jackson in May of 1989.

Originally Joe and Denise would work Merry Piglets in the summer and then Joe would fly for the Marine Reserves during the winter. In 1992 Merry Piglets turned into a year-round business, and they were off and running. The family now owns and operates 11 restaurants under Blue Collar Restaurant Group in both Jackson and Bozeman, Montana. That includes three Sidewinders locations, two Liberty Burgers and a second Merry Piglets location set to open in Bozeman in 2024.



How were they able to sustain that type of growth in a small-town market? It's no mystery to them that their growth would not be possible without the community that supports them and their over 600 employees. For this reason, they always want to give back in any way they can. They have never forgotten where they came from and still feel most connected with the working man and woman.

Most of the Rice's giving is to youth sports, veterans, employees in their company, nonprofits, and those in need. Giving back to the community and the people that helped make them successful brings them a lot of joy. Their charitable projects include building housing for their employees for below market rent, fundraisers for local nonprofits, and donating a portion of their sales/matching them.

Their Give Back Burger at Liberty Burger and Community Cocktail at Piglets feature a new nonprofit every month and \$1 of each burger/cocktail sold goes to that nonprofit.

They've done fundraisers for those battling cancer and other health issues, participated in local highway trash pickup, and they donate food and gift cards monthly. These are just some of the many ways they give back. Most recently they built JH Indoor for the community, which was a longtime dream for Joe, who believes seeing kids excelling in sports is something special. These endeavors are what makes the Rice family a cornerstone of the Jackson business community.