



JW's Food & Spirits

FOOD AND DRINK
OPTIONS IN GRAND
HAVEN ARE PLENTIFUL
THANKS TO CHRIS
WEAVERS

Photos and Story by Phil Eich,
Storyville Social, as part of the
Michigan Main Street Story
Series

"It was 1994 and I had just gotten a promotion at my job that required me to move to Traverse City. My dad was afraid I would meet someone there, have kids, and never come back home to Grand Haven.

He knew that the owner of this business was ready to sell (it was called The Hangar at the time), so he called me saying, 'Hey, I've got an opportunity to buy The Hangar. What if I bought it, you ran it for me, and then you could buy it from me when you're ready?'

That was his ploy to get me to come back home. I wasn't in love with my job up there, and I wanted to be back home anyway. I love Grand Haven, so I agreed.

From there, my dad and I started JW's Food & Spirits. Unfortunately, he and I were both very stubborn. He backed away from the business and said, 'You're on your own. You either sink or swim. If it goes down, that's on you. If it succeeds, that's on you, too.' I moved forward...and darned near ran the business into the ground a few times! I had never run a restaurant before. I had never run my own business before.

But I got through the tough years and my dad passing away: here we are swimming 28 years later.

Everybody loves our chili. It started with my mom. Years ago, she wanted me to serve white chicken chili, so she found a recipe and gave it to me.

I made it, but tweaked and tweaked and tweaked it until I felt it was right. We top it with provolone cheese and broil it which is just fabulous and use only white meat chicken. Everybody loves it.

In 2008, Bon Appétit magazine wrote to me and said a reader from California had come to my restaurant, tried our chili, and wanted the recipe. So I went back to the kitchen, scaled the recipe back to make six or eight portions, sent it in, and they published it in their October 2008 issue.

I started the wine shop next door to JW's Food & Spirits six years ago. The space had been a TV repair shop, and the owner, who was in his late 80s, was ready to sell. I had to buy it because the back door to my kitchen was on his property. He had allowed me to use it all those years, but I couldn't be sure the next owner would, so we worked out a deal.

I thought, 'OK, it's prime commercial property on Washington, the main drag. What do I want to do? What do I really love? I love wine!' I also wanted a little retail space to sell my chili and chicken salad to-go.

As a business owner in Grand Haven, I've got the best of both worlds in terms of customers. We're busy year-round. I never have to change my staffing patterns. In the winter, I've got a huge local following. In the summer, the locals go up to their cottages or out on their boats, and the tourists are here to fill their shoes. It's a win-win.

I moved back to Grand Haven from Traverse City because it's a beautiful place. We're right on Lake Michigan. We've got a great downtown. There's no crime to speak of. Everybody's friendly and my family's here.

Grand Haven is where I want to be."

- Chris Weavers, owner of JW's Food & Spirits



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