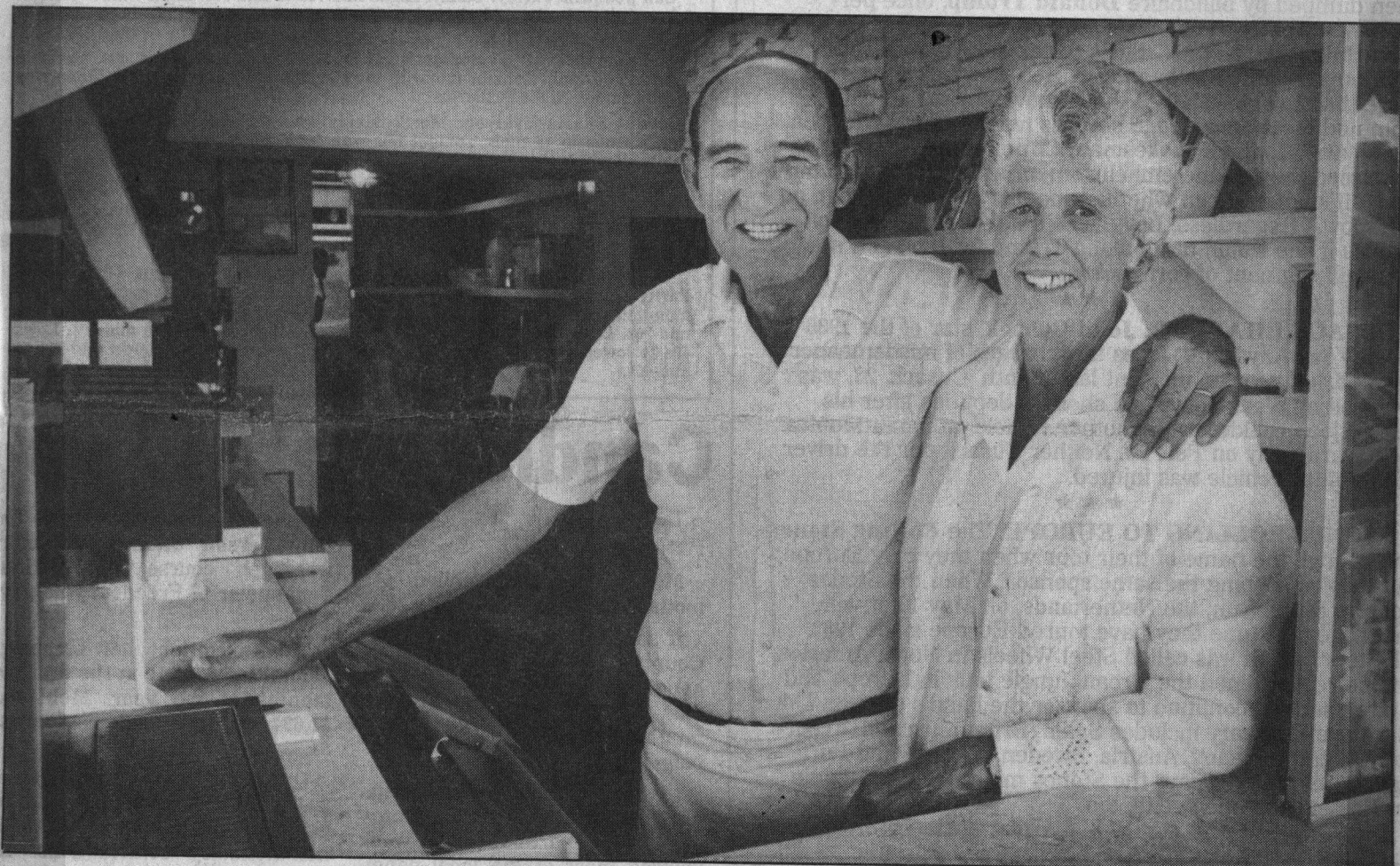


Farewell to old friends



Joe and Judene Collins have served a lot of customers from Taylor's windows.

Kurt Ellison

Hot-dog stand managers retire after 30 years

By SUSANNA HECKMAN
STAFF WRITER

JOE AND JUDENE Collins, who have served up steaming hot dogs and coffee to Watsonvillians for three decades at Taylor Brothers Hot Dogs, are full of thoughts about fishing boats, grandchildren and taking it easy for a change.

The couple has seen Watsonville children grow up, move away, come back, have children of their own. Everywhere the couple goes in

Watsonville, someone recognizes them.

Located for years at Maple and Union streets next door to the Police Department, near City Hall, Watsonville High School and Main Street, the stand has probably served hot dogs to most everyone in town.

But not being the types to bask in their celebrity status, the Collinses are retiring and moving to Porterville at the end of the month.

Joe Collins, 61, says that as for hot dogs, he's tired of them.

"I never did eat too many of them," he said. "My wife eats one every chance she gets."

Judene Collins, 59, admits to that.

And while they say they'll miss their co-workers, and want to thank every customer they've had over the years, they really have few regrets about leaving.

"After working 60 hours a week for almost 33 years, I'll be happy I don't have to come down here seven days a week," Joe Collins said. Of course, he

said, he'll have to find something to do to stay occupied.

Their son, Don, 31, who has helped them manage the stand in recent years, has already moved to Porterville with his family, including his son, Shawn, 9, and his daughter, Jacqueline, 6. That means that Joe and Judene will have their grandchildren literally next door, which will probably solve the problem of staying occupied.

"We've already got a good
See RETIRE page 11 ▶

RETIRE

► From page 1

fishing boat, and my grandson loves to fish," Joe Collins said.

Judene Collins said, "We didn't have a lot of time to spend with them when they were tiny — we'll be seeing a lot of them."

They have other family in the Porterville area as well. In fact, it's where they came from before Taylor's transferred them here. They worked for the actual Taylor brothers, Kelly and Jim, and Jim's wife, Pauline, who opened the original hot dog stand in Visalia in 1952 and another one, since closed, in Porterville.

"A lot of people think I'm Taylor, we've been here so long," Joe Collins said.

When they started, they were the only employees at the stand except for one other half-time worker. Now they manage it, and have six employees.

Two months before the Oct. 17 earthquake, Taylor's moved a block down Union Street to its present location across from the Plaza. The place is always humming at lunchtime weekdays, and stays open until midnight. On weekends it stays open until 1 a.m. A few months ago it began closing on Sundays, breaking a three-decade tradition.

"When the weather's pretty, we're usually busy," Joe said, standing in the parking lot of the stand after a busy lunch shift one day last week. "People really mix here. The well-to-do and the transients will mix here, where they won't inside."

Ruth Valdez, who has worked with the Collinses on and off and has known them for 12 years, said they have a knack for making people feel right at home.

Another employee, Richard Martinez, who estimates he met the Collinses when he was about 4, said he'd miss them, too.

The employees tried to hold a Sunday picnic for the Collins, serving ribs and — of course — hot dogs, but kept getting rained out.

So finally they just brought the picnic to the stand, and it was another lunch at Taylor's.