

**GLENDALE POPS ORCHESTRA**  
Matt Catingub Artistic Director/Conductor  
**The Premiere**  
May 13 at 8:00 pm | Alex Theatre

**KENNY LOGGINS**  **DAVID BENOIT**  **MONICA MANCINI** 

A portion of the proceeds from this event go to support Glendale Arts

## What's in a name?

Root Beer Joe's triggers magical memories of a different time

By [Dan O'Heron](#) 05/05/2011

Way back when, I let a friend tag along with me to a pre-grand opening restaurant invitation. He had a lot going for him — job, boat, letterman's sweater. But in public he was too shy to let anyone in on it.

My friend's name was David Reed. But on this night, for fun, when a young lady of my acquaintance came up and gave me the obligatory hug, I said, "Jennifer, I'd like you to meet my pal, Coconut Harry Reed."

Darting a sharp glance at me, Reed then turned his head away. Had I set us up for something as innocent as a newborn babe or had I created a new-laid egg?

"Coconut Harry," Jennifer exclaimed. "How good of you to come."

Later, after more hugs and a handshake, Coconut Harry was surrounded by people and appeared to be having a jolly time, while I stood alone looking for a place to set a half-empty plate so I could grab another drink.

Nicked by the name, Coconut Harry was transforming the crowd and was in turn transformed by it. There was first a nagging curiosity and then happy trust on both sides. I got those feelings again about names the other day when a young lady said to me with a big smile, "I just got back from Root Beer Joe's."

Why this name? "I wanted to get away from accounting and open a place to eat," said owner and proprietor Joe Wong. "I've always loved root beer and drank it wherever I could find it."

Joe indicated that often meant driving out into rural areas where most people wouldn't stop unless they were hobbled to a halt by a flat tire — "Unless," said Joe, "they spotted an orange and brown A&W Root Beer stand and a frosty mug. Wanting my name on something I loved, it simply came out: Root Beer Joe's."

These days, Joe pours six root beers, most of them from vintage glass bottles he gets from Galco's soda pop mecca in Highland Park. A huge array of other natural-sugar, no-corn-syrup sodas include Nesbitt's Orange and Virgil's Black Cherry Cream Soda. For more fizz, and the amusement of nearby Caltech students, Joe's looking to bring in anti-social labels like "Brainwash" and "Willie's Hemp Power."

Proclaiming the name Root Beer Joe's, the colorful A-frame sign that's posted outside on the Lake Avenue sidewalk stands in sharp contrast to the English pallor of the arcade and its tut-tutting boutiques. Though its facade is in keeping with the others, Root Beer Joe's place seems a bit out of kilter in character — clean and neat, but no boutique.

"I know," said Joe. "But at my first glimpse of the arcade, I loved the look. It's a postcard of London. The red telephone booth reminds me of Harry Potter."

Born and raised in San Francisco and university-schooled, Joe packs Bay Area food lore into his sandwich recipes. Not at all like a red-sauce joint in West Covina, sandwiches at Root Beer Joe's jump with a special San Francisco garlic sauce. When heated, the aroma — an arousing ambrosia — is as perfect for lunch as Chanel No. 5 is for carousing after dinner.

Sandwich bread choices include wheat, rye, French and Dutch Crunch. I prefer the latter. A



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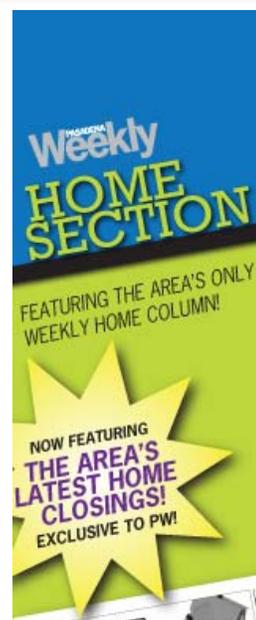
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favorite of San Francisco, it's unforgivably ignored by most sandwich shops in the Southland.

Biting into its gold-mottled exterior, there's just a slight "click" of crispiness; nothing of the tough-going in heavier crusted bread varieties. But the interior texture provides a sturdy fulcrum so as not to make a mess of all the fillings.

My pastrami on Dutch Crunch, with a vintage "Pennsylvania Dutch" birch beer — a forerunner of root beer — made for a combo so luscious that it's no wonder Amish don't need Carl's Jr. Studded with creamy white fat, it helped me recall the words of Dave Fogiel, retired manager of Billy's Deli in Glendale: "Pastrami and corned beef, to be good and juicy, must be fat. People who serve it lean wear lab coats."

"You should see my corned beef," winked Joe. His dry-aged gourmet capicola ham, salami and smoked provolone sandwich may be a rich Italian treat that you can't refuse. Turkey, roast beef and Black Forest ham cut the mustard with much leaner slices. All sandwiches range between \$4.50 and \$6.75, depending on the bread and size.

If you are looking for a disease-fighting sandwich — like a salad bowl on a bun — you'll have to go to a nutrition center. Joe does carry a selection of frozen yogurt assets like acai, the Brazilian berry antioxidant which is supposed to keep you from looking like your grandparents.

But if you are just hungry, thirsty and a feeling little bit low, be off to see Root Beer Joe.

**Root Beer Joe's**  
380 S. Lake Ave., Pasadena  
Burlington Arcade  
(626) 844-3488

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