



Joe Pukos

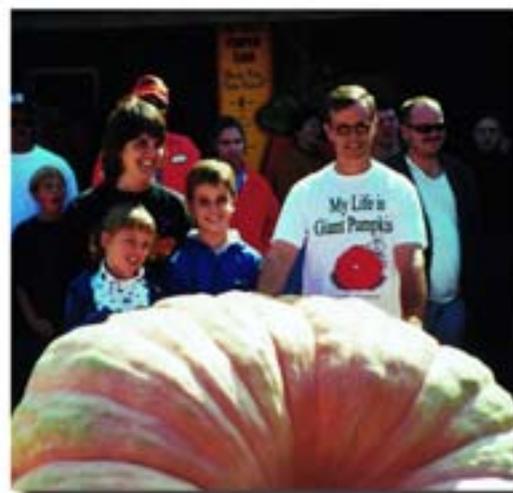
Joe began growing giant pumpkins in 1996, but still has a rare claim to fame. He has not only grown a 1000-pound pumpkin (something no one had ever done before 1996), he has grown them three years running: 1096.8 in 2000, 1061 in 2001, and 1024 in 2002.

This forestry major, and map maker for the County of Livingston, NY, has a beautiful family that includes his bride of 22 years, Terri, and 4 children including three sons: Randy, Scott, and Eric, and daughter, Emily.

His accomplishments include: finishing in first place at the WPC weigh off in Clarence, NY in 2000 where he set a new, New York state record of 1096.8 and took home a check for \$25,000, a first place finish at the GPC weigh off in Oswego, NY in 2001 with a 1061, and a second place finish in Oswego in 2002 with a 1024.

Joe watched his dad grow giant pumpkins for many years before he actually began planting them himself. He first became interested in

giant pumpkins as a result of searching for better seed for his father to plant. Joe's father passed away in 2002. The experience of seeking-out superior seed has helped this relatively young grower to leap in front of most of the world's best – proving that years of trial and error can be avoided with proper seed selection.



2000, 1096.8, Clarence, NY, 1st place, \$25000 prize!

Joe has also contributed some hot seeds to the world's gene pool. His 2000, 652 and 805; and 2001, 735 have all produced 1000 pound pumpkins.



2001, 893.5 in patch.

There are many reasons why Joe Pukos stands out as a *Heavy Hitter* but none is more evident than his insistence on growing small, carefully pruned plants. Joe is one of a new breed of giant pumpkin growers that has chosen to reduce plant size to encourage fruit growth. Disregarding advice from my previous books, Joe and many other new young growers, either for reasons of lack of space, or the intuition that we are growing pumpkins not leaves, has opened the eyes of most of the competitive giant pumpkin community, including myself, the past 4-5 years.

As my good friend, Alan Reynolds, once told me, "We're not growin' salad, we're growin' fruit," and Joe Pukos can certainly grow fruit! He has to. He has two *Heavy Hitters* in his backyard. Both Len Stellpflug and Alan Nesbit, *Heavy Hitters* in *WCGP I*, live less than 10 miles away. With neighbors like that, you have to grow big just to be respectable.



Above: 2002, 1024 and 2001, 735 with Joe and Joe's dad. Right: 2001, 893.5 at weigh off.