

JOSEPH DECUIS

“A Farm  
Dressed  
in a Tuxedo”



*By Wilhelm W. Kohl*

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## - PETE ESHELMAN'S STORY -

*I*ndiana's famous Farm-to-Table, 2015 restaurant of the year, is called Joseph Decuis. Three hundred years after Joseph Decuis grandfather, Albert Decuis left France and immigrated to Louisiana, his descendant decided to name his restaurant after him. Decuis would be proud of his namesake; in just a few short years, the restaurant has transformed a sleepy Midwest town into a culinary hot spot. But few would guess that it was born in the office of the New York Yankees.

After brief stint as a minor-league ball player, in 1977 Pete Eshelman worked in the front office of the New York Yankees, where he became part of the rebirth of the Yankee dynasty. A few years prior the team had been taken over by a driven owner. George Steinbrenner lived for one thing; winning the World Series, as many times as he could. And win he did; in his thirty-seven-year tenure as the team's owner, Steinbrenner won seven world series. Watching Steinbrenner's unparalleled drive in building his empire soon rubbed off on his young employee Eshelman, who decided to build his own dynasty.





*S*teinbrenner was the first owner to “insure” player-guaranteed contracts, in other words, laying off much of the risk. Pete’s ambition soon met opportunity, and he created an insurance company to insure professional athletes. That idea quickly expanded into a substantial business, and led into a 30 year career in the insurance business. The two companies he founded are now part of publicly traded insurance companies.

Eshelman’s sports insurance business was founded in the basement of his farm house, and quickly moved to the small Midwest town, Roanoke Indiana.



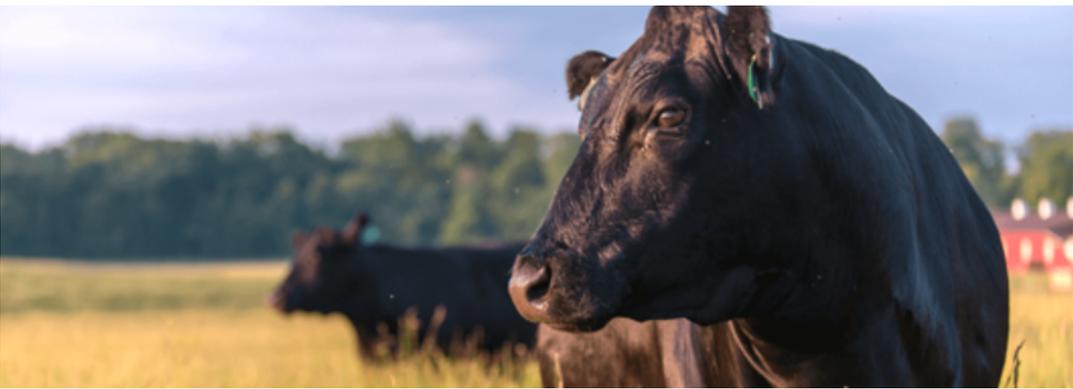


*J*oseph Decuis is located in a former Roanoke bank building, which Pete bought in 1993. The restaurant began as a private corporate dining room, which Pete used to entertain clients in small-town Indiana. But the food, under Pete's careful guidance, turned out to be just too good; word soon got out about the tantalizing dinners in that little bank down the street. In 2000, deluged with interest, Pete and his wife Alice opened the newly-christened Joseph Decuis restaurant to the hungry public.

Roanoke, like so many other Midwestern towns, had been battered by the loss of manufacturing, a phenomenon Pete set out to reverse. The Eshelman family worked hard to breathe new life into Roanoke, and with his support, downtown has gone through quite a revival over the last 15 years. They soon added a more casual eatery, a fine-food shop, and a beautiful bed-and-breakfast to the Roanoke downtown, which quickly attracted a coterie of discerning foodies. Joseph Decuis became the economic catalyst for Roanoke, which now is a poster child for the revival of small Midwestern towns.



*A*ll chefs and foodies know, gourmet food comes from gourmet ingredients, so Pete, swinging for the fences, soon established a working farm. The best ingredients of course are the ones you can raise yourself, or source from likeminded local farmers. So after cutting their teeth on vegetables, the Eshelmans soon set their eyes on God's gift to beef and pork: Wagyu Cattle and Mangalitsa Pigs.



*“Only the best is good enough for our animals and guests!”*



*I*t only took Pete twenty-five years to go from New York Yankee pinstripes to Indiana Farmer overalls.

To execute his passion for Wagyu cattle, Pete hired a fifth-generation Indiana farmer named John Pulver. As his farm manager, John enacts Pete’s philosophy of perfection. The Wagyu Cattle were magnificent, but, Pete was soon eager to round out his bench.

Pete and his team attended PigstockTC in Traverse City, Michigan in October of 2011; they came away convinced that the Mangalitsa pig was a rock star, the “Kobe Pork” was a perfect match for their Kobe beef on the Joseph Decuis menu. Within a few months Pete’s farm was Mangalitsa-ready, and the first pigs arrived the next year. Blonde breeding stock from my very own farm arrived in the spring of 2016, after an initial visit by Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche and myself the summer before, rounding out the established breeding program. Barbara was invited back later the same year for additional input into the husbandry of the animals, as well as some consulting work with the chef in preparing and presenting selected menu items.





# FARM TO FORK

## CELEBRATION

### THE *Joseph Decuis* STORY

The Joseph Decuis farm, located a few miles outside Roanoke is unique, impressive and unforgettable. *America's Wagyu Trail* called it “a farm dressed in a tuxedo.” It looks more qualified to produce Kentucky Derby Winners than delectable charcuterie.

That feeling is intentional, a reflection of the Eshelmans' passion for the animals they raise. Their cattle roam on wide pastures and are finished in an exact replica of a Japanese barn, with an extra touch. These Wagyu listen to classical music and, during baseball season, they might even cheer a bit when they hear the Yankees pummeling the Mets.

The Mangalitsas don't get music or baseball; they prefer acorns, lots of acorns. These little treats round out the Mangalitsa's additional feed, and leave plenty of room for exercise to develop that world-class combination of muscle and fat they're famous for.



The Eshelmans love entertaining in their Indiana-Elysium; Saturday evenings are dedicated to personal tours for Joseph Decuis's dinner guests, who never cease to be impressed by a first-hand introduction to their future meals. The restaurant's menu features every part of the animals, as well as a selection of tasty Mangalitsa charcuterie, prepared in-house over a period of 30 months. Also on display are succulent hams, with which happy customers have taken more than a couple selfies.





Currently the farm harvests about 50 Wagyu and 30 Mangalitsas each year which is increasing by demand. Every one of them goes to the Eschelman's two restaurants and store, all part of a delightful odyssey of taste; as Pete says, the Mangalitsa should be enjoyed like a fine wine. Pete says, "I am a restaurateur first and a farmer second, and we raise these majestic animals exclusively for the enjoyment of our restaurant guests". He adds, "My Mangalitsas and Wagyu should be savored like fine wine, a heavenly culinary experience."



Last I talked to Pete, he was making more big plans. With the Mangalitsa as his star pitcher, backed by a new culinary team, Pete's hungry for another title.

His wife, Alice, is on board every step of the way. She received 20 pregnant Wagyu heifers for her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday – and Pete lived to tell about it. She loves the baby Mangalitsa piglets and the personalities of the adult Mangalitsas. They remain happily married, (Alice would say most days) cementing their bond with their shared love of food.

So who knows, when Alice has another birthday, maybe she'll wake up to see 20 pregnant Mangalitsas waiting for her?



*Alice & Pete Eshelman*

**JOSEPH DECUIS**



***Royal Mangalitsa***

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