

HERALD NEWS

Meet the other 'Joe the Plumbers'



AMY NEWMAN/Staff Photographer

Joseph Gove, owner of Passaic's Joseph Gove Plumbing and Heating, said he'd have some fun with the attention of being "Joe the Plumber." An Ohio man with that nickname was the focus of Wednesday night's final presidential debate.



AMY NEWMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Joseph Gove, right, owner of Passaic's Joseph Gove Plumbing and Heating, helping Adrian Capani while working on a home in Nutley. Gove said he'd have some fun with the attention of being a "Joe the Plumber."

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BY JAY LEVIN AND HEATHER APPEL
STAFF WRITERS, HERALD NEWS

For North Arlington's Joe the Plumber — aka Joe Lynch — the phone began ringing with ribbing from friends before John McCain and Barack Obama finished debating Wednesday night.

Paramus' Joe the Plumber — aka Joe Rizzolo — received a post-debate surprise from his wife, Rosa: magnetic letters to spell out "I'm Joe the Plumber" on his truck.

Passaic Park's Joe the Plumber — aka Eliyohu Josef Gove, or Joseph Gove, or Joe Gove for short — said by cellphone from a job in Nutley: "I'm going to have some fun with this."

Thanks to John McCain, Barack Obama and a bald guy named Samuel J. Wurzelbacher, North Jersey's Joe the Plumbers have gotten more attention than ever before.

And North Jersey has a lot of Joe the Plumbers.

"Most of the plumbers I know are named Joe," said Rizzolo, whose one-man company is J & R Mechanical.

Joe the Plumber was the hands-down star of the final presidential debate. Republican McCain invoked "Joe the Plumber" Wurzelbacher more than 20 times in a discussion of tax policy. Three days earlier in Toledo, Ohio, Wurzelbacher had challenged Obama.

"I'm getting ready to buy a company that makes \$250,000 to \$280,000 a year," the Holland, Ohio, resident told the Democrat. "Your new tax plan is going to tax me more, isn't it?"

Lynch, co-owner of Precise Plumbing, said he dozed while watching the debate, but not before being jolted by all the talk about Joe the Plumber.

He said he "totally sympathizes" with Wurzelbacher.

"You've got to sympathize with the guy," Lynch said. "He doesn't need the government holding him back, does he?"

"You get up at 5:30 in the morning every day, work till 7:30 at night, and sometimes it feels like you're spinning your tires."

Gove, the 37-year-old owner of Joseph Gove Plumbing and Heating, called the repeated mentions of Joe the Plumber "ridiculous."

"Trying to show how [Wurzelbacher] is going to succeed or not succeed — this is not going to move the direction of the election," Gove said.

"If you look at both candidates' tax plans, which I've done, they both give and they both take. Ultimately, the taxpayer would be paying the same — no more, no less — under each plan."

To Gove, economic issues take a back seat to Israel. "I'm probably voting for McCain," he said, "mostly because as a religious Jew, I have great concern for Israel and its security and welfare."

Other local Joe the Plumbers were not impressed by McCain's invocation of the Ohio plumber and said his situation is not typical of the plumbers they know.

"My dad was a plumber and started me working when I was 12 years old," Joe Metzler of Hawthorne, who is now nearly 60, said Thursday. "I still haven't made \$250,000."

Metzler, who was working at Morristown Memorial Hospital on Thursday, said he was ribbed by friends from the time he walked on the job at 6:30 a.m. until he left. "Being a celebrity for the day was pretty nice," he said. "People said, 'I didn't know you were so rich.'"

The former Hawthorne borough councilman said he was turned off by McCain's tax plan.

"I happen to be a registered Republican, but I'm sorry, I'm not going to vote for them again," he said.

The biggest concern, Metzler said, was that under McCain's health care plan, which would tax workers' benefits, he would be levied on an additional \$90 to \$100 a week.

"I can't have my health benefits taxed," Metzler said. "They take enough taxes now."

Metzler is a member of Local 14 of the Plumbers Union, which is strongly supporting Obama.

Wayne resident Joe Lipari, also a member of Local 14, does plumbing work for the new Giants Stadium. He said he was a little sad that the presidential candidates spent so much time talking about "Joe the Plumber," instead of focusing on other issues.

"I was kind of disappointed," he said, "Because it's the last debate we're going to have."

Lipari's friends sent him text messages all day about his new fame, he said.

In the end, Lipari and Metzler said, the critical issue is what the candidates will do for blue-collar workers — people who generally make far less than \$250,000 a year.

"The blue-collar worker — you look at it from the beginning, and we built this country," said Lipari.