

Joe's big 105th birthday bash

MIKE PEETERS

REACHING the ripe old age of 105 last week, Midland's Joe Zekulich and his 98 year old wife Rose also celebrated their 81st wedding anniversary in May.

Mr Zekulich was born in Croatia and is the eldest of nine brothers and sisters.

He said the family came to Western Australia for a better life when Joe was only 16 in 1924.

Joe's wife Rose said Joe originally intended to go to Kalgoorlie to work in the mines but he was too young and so came to the Swan Valley to do market gardening.

"He got a job on my father's vineyard and that was where we met," said Rose.

"I was one of five daughters and when we first saw Joe in his strange clothes and funny hat we all laughed at him.

"But after that our relationship prospered."

Rose said Joe's talent at horticulture also blossomed and in the 1930s he researched a nematode virus that threatened grape production in the Swan Valley.

"Using methods he had learnt back in Croatia, Joe successfully grafted Australian plant cuttings onto American wild stock vines to establish a resistant rootstock," she



Joe and his wife Rose celebrated a milestone last Friday

said.

Rose said some of her happiest memories were from the visit they made back to 'the old country' — Yugoslavia — in 1964.

"Although my parents were from Croatia and spoke Croatian at home, I was born here and had never visited the country," said Rose.

"We went back to the village where Joe and my Dad were born in Dalmatia and also to many other parts of Yugoslavia, including Zagreb.

"My enduring memory is of how hard life was over there in those times and how excit-

ing coming to Australia must have been for the many immigrants."

Rose said her father had many friends in WA from many different backgrounds including Scots, Irish and Italian.

"He always wanted to integrate and feel part of the community," she said.

"When we were growing up my father ensured we had the latest gramophone records and that all of us girls were a strong part of the community.

Joe and Rose now have 13 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren. The couple now live at the Morrison



Lodge in Midland. Mr Zekulich was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in the general division this year.

The award was for services to the wine grape industry through advances in vine health and as a vigneron.

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