



HICKIE'S Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn

Local Eatery a Destination for 41 Years

By Del Duduit : Photos Ashley Gallaher Quinn



For more than 40 years, Hickie's Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn has been a mainstay in New Boston, Ohio, and has a large following of loyal and hungry customers.

“Once you’ve had a Hickie, you’ll always be back for another,” says owner Sugg Hickman.

Touted by USA Today as one of the top 10 places to get a burger in the country in 1987, Hickie’s Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn is “world famous” for its double cheeseburgers, chili, and fries and gravy. The burgers are all the same size – small – and hand-pressed and grilled in the “secret grease recipe.”

Some restaurants today, particularly diners, seem to struggle to survive. However, Hickie’s Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn, which opened its doors Dec. 10, 1975, keeps having record years and continues to flourish.

So what’s the secret to Hickie’s success?

“Honestly, it’s the grease recipe,” Sugg Hickman said. “That’s what makes it so special.” No employee or member of the family knows exactly what’s in the secret recipe. “It’s all up in my head,” Hickman said, adding that she makes the grease recipe about once a month.

The restaurant is a quaint classic diner. It seats about 54 people and is decorated with memorabilia from New Boston High School from as far back as 1941. Music from the 1950s – from artists such as Elvis Presley and Fats Domino – is always playing in the background.

Jesse and Patsy Cook, of South Webster, Ohio, have been regulars at Hickie’s for “I don’t know how many years – a long time,” said Patsy Cook. “When we come into town to shop, we always come here,” she said. “It’s the best food in town.”

For the record, the Cooks usually come to the New Boston landmark once a week and love the chili and fries -- and “oh yes, the double cheeseburgers,” said Patsy, adding that everyone should have at least one in their lifetime.

“We make everything fresh every day,” Hickman said – adding that the pots of soup go on the stove at 7 a.m., and the doors open at 9 a.m.

“I’m a regular and I love the chili and fries,” said Debbie Kielmar, of Portsmouth. “But I think that what makes this place so special is Sugg and everyone who works here. They are so friendly.”

Sandy McCann, of Minford, has been a hostess at Hickie’s Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn for 14 years and said she can’t imagine working anywhere else. “We have the best employer and we love it here,” she said. “And we love our regulars – we have the sweetest customers.”

For those who make their way into Hickie’s for the first time, they will be given



Owner Sugg Hickman serves up more than just good, old-fashioned hamburgers at Hickie's Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn; meals often come with a good dose of her signature humor and hospitality.

a brief, yet endearing, label. “If I don’t know them, I’ll ask them if it’s their first time here,” Hickman said. “If it is, then I let everyone in the restaurant know ‘We have a virgin here.’”

The oldest “virgin” to have a Hickie’s Hamburger was 92 – and patrons have traveled from as far as Germany and Italy to get some fries and gravy. “People get to say that they lost their virginity at Hickie’s with Sugg,” she said with a laugh.

But what truly makes Hickie’s Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn a local landmark is not only the food and secret recipes, but the customers, employees, and the rich history behind the restaurant. Don and Rosie Hickman, Sugg’s brother and sister-in-law, and her uncle, Sam Runyon, started the hamburger business in 1975 when Detroit Steel was beginning its shutdown phase. “People said that it would never last,” Sugg Hickman said. “But we are still here – better than ever.”

Her brother Don, who bought out her uncle’s share of Hickie’s in 1977, passed away in March 1992. So, Sugg bought Hickie’s Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn on Friday the 13th of November in 1993, and it’s been her life ever since.

“We just keep on going strong,” she said. “Our customers love us and we love them – 41 years later.”

And, Hickie’s has also seen its share of celebrities such as former Cincinnati Reds pitcher Tom Browning, local Reds scout Gene Bennett, and jazz legend Doc Severinsen. But new customers – or virgins as she calls them – often come into Hickie’s once they hit Shawnee State University as out-of-town freshmen.

“This is the first place a lot of them come – they come to Hickie’s because they’ve heard so much about it,” Hickman said.

She also added that she loves it when Saturday afternoon comes in the summer and little “baseballers and softballers” roll into the restaurant – “I call Saturday ‘brat day’ ’cause all the little brats are here after their games,” she said with a grin. “We love ’em, and they love coming here.”

The restaurant is open every Monday - Saturday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. and is closed on Sundays.

“My day off is my gambling day,” Hickman explained, “I love going to Columbus to get away for the day and gamble – it’s my relief. But I really love coming back to work every day – even if it’s just for a couple of hours.”

So in today’s world, where mom-and-pop restaurants are fading away, Hickie’s Old-Fashioned Hamburger Inn has found the secret to longevity. The secret is the grease recipe for its hamburgers combined with the famous chili and soup recipe along with its friendly employees, loyal customers and first-time “virgins.”

And oh yes -- there’s Sugg – “I’ll never retire.” **RM**

IF YOU GO:

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Hamburger Inn**
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