

December 19, 2023 ** I am planning to check in with Dave to be sure I got all facts right! Let's take bits and blog about the Valentine buildings as soon as I get his ok on my write up.

7:00-8:45 PM

Meeting of CoMo Preservation

www.comopreservation.org

The Diner on Broadway

I. Welcome by Melissa Bernhardt

The sign-in sheet was passed around and the following were present: Michael Limmer, Bailey Martin, Julie Plax, Chris Creasy, Debby Cook, Sarah Seat, Jill Womack, Bruce Alspaugh, John Emery, Meg Ross, Wylie Ross, Janice DeRosier, Melinda Moellering, Rachel Penn, Cindy McCord, Chris Cady, Nancy Cady, Ken Green, Linda Green, Stacey Thompson, Dee Wasman, Melissa Bernhardt, Elena Vega, Patrick Earney, Sarah Justice, Dennis Fitzgerald, Dave Johnson, and Dan Viets.

Event Reminders:

-In 2024, meetings will start at 6:00 PM in the Columbia Public Library Friends Room.

-Future Meeting dates: January 23, Chris Cady will speak about the History of Orr Street.
February 27, Stephen Bybee will speak about his photos of Columbia at night.

Announcements:

-CoMo Preservation's Teams are recruiting volunteers for tasks ranging from taking/organizing photos, writing content for a blog, monitoring demolitions, helping salvage historic items, videotaping presentations, to bringing snacks to these meetings.

Advocacy Team: Jan. 9 from 9-10 am at EatWell. Team Leader: Dianna O'Brien,
dobrien387@gmail.com

Education Team: Jan. 16 from 3-5 pm at the Grind on Forum. Team Leader: Julie Plax,
kikiplax@gmail.com

Restoration Team: Jan. 30 from 5:15-6:30 pm at 2815 N Oakland Gravel Rd. Team Leader:
Elena Vega, elenavega@aol.com

-Most Notable Properties brochures and forms were distributed and are on our website at:
<https://www.comopreservation.org/most-notable-property-program>.

-Become a Founding Member by joining by 12/31/2023.

-Participate as a CoMo Preservation volunteer with the Columbia Tourism Ambassador program: if you want to help you can sign up to take the training, please contact Chris Creasy at chriscreasy@hotmail.com or Dee Wasman at drwasman@gmail.com

II. Guest Speaker: Dave Johnson - History of the Broadway Diner

Origin of the Diner

Dave explained the building is a prefabricated diner dating from the early 1960's. It was brought to Columbia in 1962 or 1963 from Wichita, Kansas, where it was manufactured by Valentine Manufacturing, Inc. These diners were first made in the late 1930's with a small kitchen, but the manufacturer expanded to gas stations and photo booths when WWII veterans returned home.

Clientele

The Diner, originally known as the Minute Inn, was historically open at night for industrial workers to eat after their late shifts. At that time, the Diner was farther west on Broadway about where Walgreens is now and it had a basement. Dave described the Diner as "an essential part of campus life" while it was open nights. In the 1970's, customers were still mostly male students because female students at Stephens College still had to "dress for dinner." Over time more females started coming in. In fact, Dave explained that Kathy Folsom Hauswirth is given credit for naming the "Stretch" special. (You can read her story about going to the Diner in the early 1970's on the Diner's website at <https://www.broadwaydinercomo.com>). The Diner became known as Fran's Cafe when Fran and Gordon Merideth owned it in the 1980's.

Dave and the Diner

Dave recounted that his father was always in the food business. Although he had grown up on a farm, as a teenager he started working at a cafe and after serving in the navy, he was a cook in a cafe. Dave's family bought the diner in 1989. Five generations of his family have worked at the Diner, including his grandmother and siblings in the past and a great-nephew at this time. One employee is now his step-son. In 2001, the Diner was moved to its current location at 22 S. Fourth Street. It was stripped down to bare metal and a new counter was installed but the original layout was preserved except as needed to meet ADA requirements with a ramp and space for a wheelchair to maneuver. There is no basement at the current location because of the water level so there is additional storage added on. The clientele demographic changed after the move with less students but more visitors in town for football games, music events, and agriculture events.

Covid and the Diner

The Diner served lunches when the schools were not serving lunches during Covid. About 10,000 families were served during 18 months of school closures.

Diner Staff

One well-known employee, Rosa Alma Burns, had previously worked at Schnucks when she started at the Diner for the previous owners. She worked until she was in her 80s. Eunice McCaleb worked nights for years and now her daughter and grandson work at the Diner. Alex Tribek flipped pancakes at the Diner.

Other Valentines buildings in town

Guy's Diner, Mugs Up, and Cafe Poland were also manufactured by the Valentines company. Guy's Diner was on Garth Avenue where Bob McCosh is now. It only had 7 stools. Dave's family owned and operated Guy's Diner from 1977 to 1986. Dave recalled that he served many people who were in town to receive treatment at Ellis Fischel Hospital. When it closed, the building was

moved out of town and then to Ohio where it was added onto a house. Mugs Up is still operating as a drive-in just off Business Loop 70. Cafe Poland is a Valentines building but it does not have a counter or serve typical diner food. Dave clarified a common misnomer - explaining that the Guy's Diner building was a different building than the building that was occupied by Fran's Diner and now the Broadway Diner. Guy's Diner was a much smaller layout and only had a counter, and no dine in tables.

Q&A

In response to a question about a sit-in protest held at the Diner in April 1960, Dave responded that was before his time at the Diner but he described the racism as "disgusting." He recounted that many people still remember that they had to eat through the window because they were not allowed inside. He explained that he hopes that feeding people during Covid helps change the narrative.

Another person asked about the source of the name "Jasper Pie." He laughed and explained that his wife had retired from the University of Missouri's Center for Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources where she had collected both graduate students and recipes so the pie is named for a student who brought her a blueberry pie.

Dave answered a question about the "Bullpen," explaining that it was built on-site so it was not "a diner" but that it served "a really good brain sandwich." He explained that its roots were old highway 40.

Someone recounted watching a storm develop during sunrise while he ate breakfast at the Diner in 1990 and seeing the church steeple struck by lightning. Dave noted that he has a photograph of the Trackside Cafe, which was across the street for the Diner's current location, in which the Second Baptist Church is visible in the background with its steeple intact.

Dave stated that his favorite thing about Columbia is the community because "people come together." He also noted that it is fun to watch generations grow. He noted that he currently has great staff and that the "Covid kids" are great.

Another person recalled going to Guy's Diner when she was 8-years old with her Dad, and that only men were there then, her Dad said it was OK because she was only a little girl. Her younger brother had also worked at Guy's Diner as a young person clearing the counter, washing dishes and peeling potatoes. For her son's birthday, she had called ahead to the current location of the Broadway Diner to say she was bringing young boys in for breakfast after a sleepover party. When they arrived someone had written all the boys' names on paper diner hats and everyone at the Broadway Diner sang "Happy Birthday" to him while he paraded up and down the aisle of the Diner.