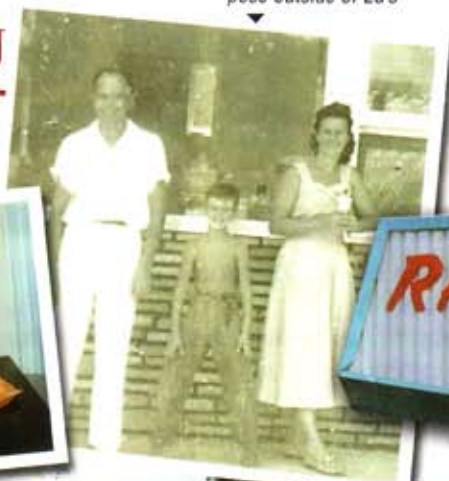


ED'S DRIVE-THRU

By JACKIE PERRONE

Earl, Nikki, and Tincy Setzler pose outside of Ed's



Nikki making those famous Ranchburgers

The laminated "last burger served"



Last Day at Ed's Drive-Thru



When a long-held family business closes down, the owners usually hold onto some souvenirs of their hard work and dedication.

But a laminated hamburger? Get real! Nikki Setzler, lifelong resident of West Columbia, enjoys telling the stories of Ed's Drive-Thru, owned and operated by his family through four generations. The tale of the laminated hamburger was the final one. More later about that.

"My father Earl and grandfather Harry bought Ed's Drive-Thru in 1951," he says. "They kept the original name, Ed's, because it already had a good reputation in the community. People started calling my dad Ed, and it just stuck."

"We lived in a 3-room house behind the diner, at 923 Meeting Street, just past Triangle City. I started there as a Curb-Hop when I was eight years old, barely big enough to see across the auto window ledge."

For 44 years the Setzlers put in 14 and 16 hour days feeding the locals who chose to hang out at their place. They developed legendary specialties, such as the Ranchburger, the Be Bop, and the Tom Tom.

People came from all over for the home-

made chili; that recipe was interred with the bones of Ed's Drive-Thru at closing.

"I still say the Ranchburger was the best hamburger ever made," says Nikki.

Brookland-Cayce High School figures large in the Ed recollections. It was The Place to Go after B-C football games. Many class reunions were held there over the decades. No alcohol in any form was ever served at Ed's, just good-eatin' burgers, fries, and milk shakes before fast food franchises became a way of life.

Earl Setzler died in 1979, his wife in 1994. The decision was made to close Ed's, and when the notice went out, hundreds turned out for a final meal, August 26, 1995.

"We had folks show up from all over the state and outside of it, too," according to Nikki Setzler. "Alex Sanders brought his daughter up from Charleston for one last time. Bobby Kneece came to stand once more under the big magnolia tree where he proposed to his future wife."

"We were closing Saturday night. I went there Thursday afternoon and did not get home again until Sunday. Saturday midnight, the lines stretched out into the street."

Nikki won't identify the friend who

asked if he could have the very last Ranchburger from Ed's. Nikki prepared it for him, with fries and a milk shake in the Ed's cup.

"When he took it home with him, he said he just couldn't eat it. It brought back too many memories. What he did instead, was proceed to laminate the whole thing, and brought it back to us the next week. That was a first and probably a last."

Nikki Setzler, now a successful attorney and South Carolina State Senator, is proud of Ed's and everything it represented.

"It certainly was the best-known diner of its kind in this community," he says. "It had a huge impact on my life, and on my children, who also learned about hard work and dedication there."

"Ed's made it possible for me to have a college education, which my parents never had, as well as law school. I learned about honest labor, and community service, and building lasting friendships." Even today, a decade after Ed's closed, I hear it mentioned several times a day in my conversations with the people of West Columbia. "It's who I am." ♦

Ed's Drive-Thru • Closed August 26, 1995