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**MAKE A SHORT STOP
FOR A LONG BURGER**

JAN 14, 64



Dea's Drive-In always has provided the best hamburgers, hot dogs, french fries, etc., in the Gresham-Sandy area but this year the "headquarters" in Gresham underwent a complete remodeling program. Dea's was closed for a couple of weeks during late April during which time the remodeling program was completed. The No. 1 shop is here in Gresham with another on the Loop highway at Boring road and a third in Sandy. Owners are Mr. and Mrs. Dea Sparks. The Gresham unit is shown here.

DEA'S TURNS 50

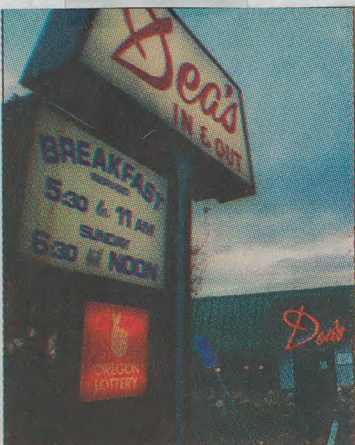
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*Sparks family's longburgers stay the same despite a change in location,
a different brand of pickles and new employees*

BY SHARON NESBIT
staff writer

The owners' son, Mike Sparks, remembers the first restaurant, on Powell Boulevard, as a "little bitty thing," of about 20 feet long. "It looked like some kind of trailer, but it wasn't," he said.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



At left, Dea and Evelyn Sparks, along with their sons, Pat and Mike, all still work at Dea's In & Out at 755 E. Burnside St. Dea and Evelyn bought the restaurant in 1953 when it was a tiny drive-in across from the Mt. Hood Theater.

Cruising, as old fogies know it, ended in Gresham in 1970 when Dea's In & Out moved from Powell Boulevard to 755 E. Burnside. The police chief didn't like it much, saying it was harder to keep track of the kids in town.

"We were Arnold's on 'Happy Days,' " says Mike Sparks, the second generation of the Dea's In & Out dynasty. "Happy Days" continue 50 years later because Dea's still cranks out 400 to 500 custom cooked hamburgers a day.

Old fogies remember dragging Powell — the same people who have spent a lifetime wolfing Dea's longburgers. Cruising Powell. Chrome-trimmed satellites orbiting Dea's. Exhaust plumes colored pink from the glow of tail lights. The throaty rumble of dual pipes. Elvis singing "I Want to Hold Your Hand," until the record in Dea's jukebox wore clean through.

The Sparks family celebrated 50 years as a burger emporium this year, marking the April day in 1953 when Dea and Evelyn Sparks bought the tiny drive-in on Powell, just across from the Mt. Hood Theater. Many accounts in their own files say 1954, but maybe that was when it caught on. Either way, Gresham will be a century old in 2005, having dined at Dea's for more than half its civic life.

Dea's lived through Elvis and on to the Beatles, past fuzzy dice and into stretch pants, from cherry cokes to straight Coke and Marlboros. Then, it was a jukebox. Now, it is canned music and state lottery Keno. Then it was cruising, now you sit

down and eat in, three meals a day. But the constant is the rectangular hamburger still on a fresh-baked bun with toasty edges from the grill, still tasting just as it did when you were 15 and ate the first one. The milkshakes, homemade. The French fries, hot. The menu listed in black plastic letters against the board.

It takes work to stay the same, Mike Sparks says. "The only real problem is that ingredients you use in things, cheese brands or pickle companies, change. For years we used Nalley's, but you can't get it anymore. When pickles changed, I wound up trying 15 different brands of pickles to find something we

Does he still eat the house burger? "I've got one in my hand right now," he says.

Dea Sparks, 78, is still there every day, still slim-hipped, wearing a crisp shirt with a hair cut pretty much the same as it was then. Evelyn Sparks, 75, is a daily presence, too. You wonder if she wore her apron in 1996 when the two celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in Dea's.

"He works in the office. He gave up the restaurant," Mike says of his father. Three generations of the family work at Dea's,

including sons Mike and Pat Sparks. (A third son, Gary, works and lives in Tucson, Ariz.) Pat's son, Clint, who bakes the buns, and Mike's daughter, Kerri, who runs the waitress crews, are the third generation. The fourth generation, Mike says, is too little to work, though he remembers a childhood

of peeling potatoes.

That first restaurant was a "little bitty thing," maybe 20 feet long. "It look liked some kind of trailer, but it wasn't," Mike says.

Dea Sparks had worked as a baker at Keller's Pastry Shop on Powell where they made the long buns. He shaped his burgers to fit the buns. Other places have rectangular hamburgers, but Dea's copyrighted the longburger name. When Keller closed his bakery, Dea's bought the old pans and took up making their own buns.

The first hangout was technically

in what is now Powell Boulevard. The street was widened in the early 1970s, requiring a move from Powell to Burnside. For a while, when both restaurants still existed, there was the old Dea's and the new Dea's. There was once a Dea's in Sandy and the start of what seemed like a chain, but they ran out of relatives to run the empire, so they settled into the Burnside location.

In 1995, they expanded, adding a bar and a restaurant with a different menu. In 2000, they expanded again, remodeling the bakery where some of the original long-



burger bun pans are still in use, expanding the bar and building a bigger walk-in cooler.

In peak times, 40 people work there, some are "kids" who used to cruise Powell. Terry Hill works the breakfast shift three days a week and has been there more than 30 years. She met her husband at Dea's and both daughters worked there at one time.

"Her rounds are like clockwork, and should be," wrote Kim Wetzel, former *Outlook* reporter in a story in 2000. Wetzel knew whereof she spoke, because she, too, worked

breakfast at Dea's. Stuck in her memory was a breakfast order inscribed only "Nellie." It meant, one medium poached egg, oil-free hash browns, limp bacon and sour-dough toast uncut and unbuttered.

The breakfast regulars have their favorites, and they show up regular as any alarm clock. But it's the longburger that ends the day, served at the table, or handed out in a paper sack at the drive-in.

They don't call it cruising anymore. They call it gridlock. But the taste of a Dea's hamburger is still the same.

Dea's In & Out: Burger has

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Powell Boulevard in the 1950s was often a blur of blinking tail lights and rumble of straight pipes, especially on Friday nights. The Chevs and Fords were packed with teen-aged girls in ponytails and poodle skirts and guys wearing letterman's jackets and rolled-up jeans.

"Powell was the center of Gresham, and for the kids it was the drag — the gut. You could walk faster than traffic moved. And Dea's was at one end of that cruising circle," recalls Pat Sparks, whose father Dea Sparks established the small drive-through restaurant in 1954.

Most everybody's idea of the perfect date was to go to the Friday night game and then head for Dea's.

"If you remember the television series 'Happy Days,' you know about Arnold's. We were the Arnold's of Gresham," says Mike Sparks, who, like his brother was raised in that happy days atmosphere.

Many of those folks who used to hang out at Dea's still do. The restaurant moved to Burnside Road in 1970, but much of their loyal clientele and most of their employees are still there.

"I was there yesterday for lunch. My kids go there. My grandkids love it there. Every time I go in there, I run into kids I went to school with," says Karen Phillips, a former employee and one of the restaurant's first customers at about age 9.

She laughs about calling her friends "kids," and continues, "Everybody still goes back. It's kind of still the hangout."

The reason, the Friday night crowd will tell you, has a lot to do with the rectangle hamburger with that special sauce. The story of the oddly shaped burger begins with Dea Sparks, who they called the "Deacon."

He worked for Carl Keller, a Swiss gentleman who owned the pastry shop. When Sparks established his business with only a drive-through window across the street from the bakery, he bought his buns fresh from his former employer and shaped his hamburger to fit the

'We were the Arnold's of Gresham.' — Mike Sparks

"When I first started working here, I'd come into work and face a mountain of hamburger that I helped mold individually with a plastic molder," recalls Penny Volker, a waitress at Dea's since 1962.

When Keller closed, Dea bought his ovens and maple bar cutter and continued to bake his own buns.

"The original place was so small, you could flip the hamburger, make the shake and bag the fries without moving," says Pat Sparks, who also noted that the small drive-in was Coca Cola's biggest account.

Local police, he says, hated it because so many teen-agers would wait in line to go through Dea's and traffic would naturally back up. They also hated it when Dea's moved to Burnside because it was much more difficult to keep track of the kids.

"We've had many couples tell us that they met in our parking lot. I'll bet a few of their kids were conceived there, too," says Pat Sparks to his brother's embarrassment.

The Dea's hamburger and its sauce is the same today as it was back then. And it is still their most popular item on the menu.

"We left the food the same and expanded the menu. But we still make our own buns in the back," says Mike Sparks, who last week was asked to ship sauce, buns and burger to a homesick soldier in Saudi Arabia.

Requests like that are not rare, and is why the family has not tampered with Dea's burger. Dea Sparks, his family and the comfortable, home-spun atmosphere at their restaurant is another reason folks came back then and keep coming back now.

"Dea wouldn't put up with any rowdiness. If anyone got out of line, he would call their parents. He wat-

ched out for everybody's kids. I guess that was one reason people allowed their kids to go there," Phillips says.

"The old customers feel as much a part of that family as the employees do. It's an institution. The family attitude and philosophy of giving their customers whatever they want, whether it's on the menu or not, has carried through with the boys," says Volker, referring to the infamous "stumpy burger" and "ranch burger."

Until the late 1950s all employees were related to Dea and Laura "Evelyn" Sparks. Pat and Mike were peeling potatoes for french fries by age 6, and baking buns by about age 10. Their children now bake buns for the family restaurant that employs 42 people.

Like Dea and Evelyn (known as the queen of the fry kettle still the official french fryer), the Sparks brothers consider three days off as a vacation.

"The only time we were closed for more than one day is when we remodeled in 17 days a couple of years ago," Mike Sparks says.

The restaurant changed in appearance with a larger sit-down dining room, and the regular breakfast crowd is thankful. They added computerized registers, and the long-time waitresses hate them.

"One of the games we played at home was mom and dad quizzing us by asking, 'How much is three hamburgers,' or 'How much is a hamburger, fries and Coke.' The answer was \$1.80 in each case. Looking back, I don't know how we ever remembered all that," Pat Sparks says.

He gives his father credit for being five years ahead of the drive-through traffic breakthrough of having a speaker to order from before the window station.

"One window was one order. Then we added another window where you would order at one window and pick it up at the next. Dad was a bit of a radio buff, so he wired a (citizens band) speaker on the side of one window, and we were waiting on three people at once. That was at least five years before the national chains got the idea," he says.

It changed in 37 years



From left, Mike, Evelyn and Pat Sparks own and operate Dea's.

Long burger still Dea's mainstay 55 years

by Mara Stine
staff writer

A lot can change in 55 years. But one thing holds true at Dea's In & Out — the restaurant's classic long burger.

Not messing with a good thing is Dea's recipe for success, says Pat Sparks, whose parents Dea and Evelyn Sparks bought the itty bitty drive-in in 1953. In 1970, Dea's moved to its current location on Burnside Road.

"We started with a product in 1953, and we're still doing it today," says Pat, who helps runs

the place with his brother Mike. "We try to keep everything the way we did it back then."

For example, the long burger's distinctive rectangular shape comes from the original pans used to bake fresh buns every day. Each burger — about 575 a day — is custom made-to-order. Onion rings are sliced and breaded by hand in the back room.

The first restaurant, tiny at about 20 feet long, was on Powell Boulevard across from the Hood Theater. Dea had worked as a baker at Keller's Pastry Shop also on Powell, where they made the

DEA'S IN & OUT

Dea's In & Out is located at 755 E. Burnside Road. Hours are from 5:30 a.m. to "usually midnight" Monday through Saturday; 6 a.m. to about midnight on Sunday. "If there's still customers, and they're still going, we'll stay open," Pat says of the accommodating closing time. Dea's In & Out can be reached by calling 503-665-3439.

long buns, and shaped his burgers to fit them. When the bakery

closed, Dea bought the bun pans and started baking his own.

In the early 1970s, the widening of Powell forced Dea's move to Burnside.

While the long burger remains the same, there have been a few changes. In 1995, Dea's expanded with a bar and a restaurant with a different menu. They expanded again in 2000. And one of the newest changes is that the place has gone smoke-free — even the lounge.

Pat says staying true to the landmark eatery's original burger is the key to Dea's longevity.

ars later

"It seemed to work and that's what we stayed with," he says.

Eight family members still work at Dea's. Pat's wife, Becki, oversees the lounge, and his son, Clint, is a manager. His nephew, Aaron, and niece, Kasey, also work there. Not counting relatives, the restaurant employs 36 people.

Dea, the restaurant's namesake, is now 82 and still makes a daily appearance, but sticks to office work. His wife of 62 years, Evelyn, now 80, also is a reliable presence.

"You couldn't get her out of here with a crowbar," Pat quips.