

Burke, H

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Restaurant

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STORY BY BENZIE SANGMA SPECIAL TO THE INTELLIGENCER

come to his stand. (The stand was called, Classy Lunch, for the first couple of years and then it became, Harry Burke's Hamburgers.)

"Since he used to be a tailor, he used to humourously refer to his hamburgers as 'tailor-made deluxe hamburgers' and people loved them. Many people called my father's hamburgers the 'best in town'," recalled Burke proudly about his father's entrepreneurship.

It was simply a matter of time before the stand became a favourite hangout place for the people in the community.

"People used to come here after a dance, for example, or any social functions. They came just to relax, have hamburgers and Coke and listen to the jukebox.

"Soon, my father, along with my mother, developed a great reputation for his hamburgers," said Burke.

The fact that there was no Highway 401 at the time worked in favour of the Burkes.

Travellers commuting from Ottawa or Kingston to Toronto had to pass by the Burke's hamburgers stand location and it gave the older Burke ample opportunities to catch the attention of this crowd.

"The traffic near the stand was very busy. If you're going to Toronto, you have to pass through that road and it was a significant advantage to

have my father's stand there," said Burke.

The city and in turn the Burke's hamburgers stand enjoyed the visit of many tourists from the United States in the summer time. Add to this the company of en route truckers and tourists in buses, kids from the nearby Albert College and Ontario School for the Deaf out for their break.

"It was very, very busy. It was almost like McDonald's now, only on a smaller scale. It was a social place.

"We had good times there. We got to know many people in the community and many of them became lasting friends of our family," recalled Burke fondly.

The Burkes were originally from Poland with the parents growing up in New York. They left the hamburger business in Belleville when they moved to Toronto in 1955. Since then, the hamburger stand continued to be run by other families before it went out of business.

The younger Burke, now 74 years old, went back to his father's old trade. For the last five decades, he has been doing custom tailoring in the men's wear industry. In 1996, he retired from his business only to bounce back three years later to open his present store, Joe Burke's Men's Apparel on the second floor at 257 North Front St. Apparently, he is happier being a businessman than a retiree.

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