

# Under the canopy. . .



WLS knew where the teens hung out in the '50s and put a DJ, Jivin' Jackson, in a booth atop Lendy's on Lee Highway (left). The Teletrays under the canopy (below) at Lendy's let customers order by intercom.

## You could spend a long time for very little money at the drive-in

By RANDY WALKER  
Staff writer

In 1956, Andrew Lewis High School student Pat Dotson was pretty deep in debt. He had bought a nearly new '56 Mercury hardtop with overdrive and the monthly payments were formidable.

Dotson went to see Leonard Goldstein, who was planning a drive-in called Shoney's on Lee Highway. Goldstein hired him as a kitchen assistant.

Dotson was there the day Shoney's opened. He doesn't remember how many Big Boys, onion rings and strawberry pies he helped make those first frantic months, but he remembers the crowds — a "mob-type affair."

Shoney's could park up to about 100 cars, and the customer response was "too great to handle," he recalls. There were other drive-ins in town, but nothing this big, and nobody else had a staff of a dozen curb girls in uniform.

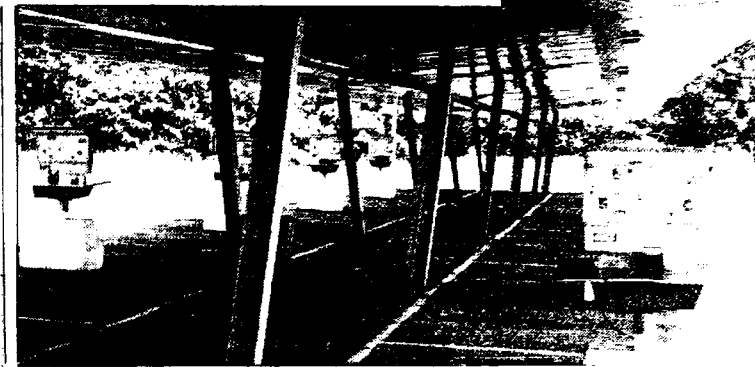
Shoney's was "red hot" those first few years, says S.W. "Bud" Stockton. But despite its success, "Shoney's" isn't the name that many Roanokers recall when you ask them about the drive-in era.

Ask people who were teen-agers in the '60s to recall Big Boys, Friday evening dates and thick walnut shakes. Ask them about Saturday nights, defending the school honor, and drinking 3.2 beer. Ask them about Sunday afternoons hanging out for hours on end, eating nothing, drinking nothing, listening to the radio until the car battery started to run down.

Ask them to remember Lendy's.

In 1959 Leonard Goldstein changed his restaurant's name from Shoney's to Lendy's. Lendy's was his 2-year-old daughter.

Lendy's led Roanoke in drive-in technology. He used special trays that fit around the steering wheel. He was the first in the area to install canopies over the parking lot. Around 1960, he was the first to install the "Teletray" electronic ordering system.



Goldstein was always running special promotions. Around 1960 he built a radio booth on top of his flagship restaurant on Lee Highway. WLS disc jockey Jivin' Jackson's broadcasts were wired through the Teletray system to each car in the parking lot.

By 1964 Goldstein had four units in Roanoke, two in Lynchburg and one in Richmond. The Lendy's kitchen operation was more complex than the typical drive-in, says Dotson, with chicken that was pressure-fried, complicated

recipes and onion-rings that were hand-bread every day.

Families came in for complete meals, and the crowd for lunch and dinner was mainly adult. But after 9 p.m., the teen-agers took over.

In the mid-'60s, Butch Huff, Daryel R Smith and H.C. Crotts belonged to the Olegas (pronounced o-MEE-gas), an Andrew Lewis fraternity. After Sunday afternoon

ternly meetings, they migrated to the Lendy's on Lee Highway.

They did not have a legal deed, but Huff, Crofts and company owned the back row of the parking lot on Lee Highway. Huff's flaking '66 Dodge (the "Red Ram"), Crofts' '47 Chevy and Smith's '37 Chevy were permanent installations.

You could arrive on foot and get in a friend's car, you could leave your car and ride off with somebody else. "If Daryel's '37 Chevy was there and we needed a car, we'd start it with a hair-pin," says Huff.

The possibilities for amusement were endless.

You could drive the Lendy's 500, circling around the canopy roof. You could drive back and forth from Lee Hi Lendy's to Melrose Lendy's. You could throw footballs in the parking lot. You could drink 3.2 beer, until you got caught. You could do impolite things to embarrass your buddy's girlfriend. You could think up ways to torture each other.

Weather was no obstacle. A man's car was his castle. "We was there all through Christmas," recalls Crofts. "We'd sit in our cars on the back row. Snow, sleet, rain, it didn't make any difference."

A minimum amount of money was spent. One of Huff's acquaintances declined to expend any financial resources at all, preferring instead to dine on half-eaten Buddy Boys and leftover french fries that he scavenged off Teletrays. This gentleman favored a beverage concocted from whatever leftover sodas he could find. He poured 'em all into a cup and drank it.

Such behavior was frowned upon by the management, as it tended to discourage the more lucrative family trade. One manager especially disapproved of any out-of-the-automobile activi-

ty, even car-to-car socializing and hood-sitting. "He had this thing about wanting us to be in the car at all times," says Huff.

This repressive policy earned him the nickname of "Hitler." One of the worst things that could happen was for Hitler to ban you from the parking lot. More than once, Crofts, Huff and friends found themselves in Hitler's office, begging him to let them come back.

The back row boys may have fought among themselves, but they closed ranks immediately whenever school pride was threatened.

Lee Hi was the exclusive turf of Andrew Lewis. The Franklin Road Lendy's belonged to Patrick Henry. The Williamson Road location was controlled by William Fleming.

"It was real dangerous territory if you crossed over," recalls Anne Lee Stevens Ostaseski, who graduated from Andrew Lewis in '67. "You went to your specific Lendy's and if somebody was there who wasn't supposed to be, you knew it."

Girls from Cave Spring were welcome at Lee Hi, but "mostly if somebody was down there from Patrick Henry or William Fleming, they were looking for a fight," Crofts recalls.

The Melrose location was dominated by "greasers," Crofts says. Anybody, regardless of high school affiliation, was welcome as long as they had a fast car. Sometimes the Melrose greasers would cruise over to Lee Hi, looking for somebody to race.

Certain rules had to be observed, in male-female relations as well as in territorial conflicts. Guys could drink beer, but respectable girls could not. It was OK for a guy to sit in a car full of girls, but a girl couldn't sit in a car full of guys. "It was etiquette," says Ostaseski.

How many hours did they sit in the parking lot? "One guy who had a convertible would have to start his car every few hours to charge the battery," Ostaseski says. "That's how long we sat there, listening to the radio."

Contemporary newspaper accounts confirm the testimony of Ostaseski, Huff and Crofts. In a 1967 story, W.S. Richardson Jr., manager of Bill's Barbecue Drive-in Restaurants in Richmond, said teen-age patrons of drive-ins "spend little money, sit for a long time, harass the waitresses and create havoc in the parking area."

Crofts says he and his friends never harassed waitresses. But he and Huff recall with undeniable nostalgic pleasure how they spent little money, sat for a long time, and created havoc in the parking area.

Meanwhile, times were changing in the food business.

In 1967, McDonald's officials assured the County Planning Commission that a unit planned for Williamson Road would have no jukeboxes, no curb service and no women employees. Presumably, such elements were sources of trouble.

As the chains proliferated, people had more choices than ever before, says Leonard Goldstein. Eating in your car no longer seemed so attractive. "We lost our young crowd when the pizza operations began to saturate the market," Goldstein says.

Minimum-wage laws enacted in 1967 were another burden on curb-service drive-ins, which used more labor than self-service fast-food units. And teen-age rowdiness contributed to the decline by driving away adult business.

Goldstein says he recognized the demise of drive-ins as early as 1970. In 1975, he pulled out curb service and converted to dining room only.

Goldstein is now the president of Bingo's Bakery in Salem. The bakery is next door to the old location of the Lendy's on Lee Highway.

In a back room at Bingo's, there is a drawer that contains menus, advertisements and hundreds of photographs from the Lendy's era.

"Over the years I've run into so many people who tell me they used to date at Lendy's," Goldstein says. "Couples who are now married tell me they met and dated in the Lendy's parking lot."

Pat's Cafe is the last surviving manifestation of Lendy's.

Under a franchise agreement with Goldstein, former kitchen boy Pat Dotson opened Pat's Cafe on Shenandoah Avenue in 1980. All food is cooked according to old Lendy's recipes.

Faded menus and 3-D plastic signs from the '60s decorate the walls, advertising the Buddy Boys hamburger, Longfella sandwich and the famous strawberry pie.

"I thought I could have some part in reliving the era," says Dotson, "keeping the taste alive in foods that have never been successfully duplicated."

Dotson isn't sure why drive-ins died out. Maybe the operators decided people would rather eat inside, he says. Maybe the operators left the scene rather than the customers.

Whatever. Drive-ins are gone now, that's for sure. All that's left now is the taste of Buddy Boys, orange freezes and onion rings.

To many former teen-agers, this is the taste of their youth.

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