

RESTAURANT REVIEW 38 THE SEARCH FOR GOOD CHEAP GREASY BURGERS
August 8, 2016

FOOD: IN SEARCH OF THE GOOD & CHEAP GREASY CHEESEBURGER:

Stop 1: Brunswick Bowl Four Seasons Shopping Center Olive Blvd.

The snack bar at a bowling alley! What better place to find a cheap greasy burger! We were half right. We were told by a bowler that after the bowling alley was sold about two years ago all the prices at the snack bar went up as much as 80-percent.



Here I am ordering at the snack bar. They deliver the food to your lane or to the table you are at away from the lanes.

The cheeseburger was a whopping \$7.99. It came with fries whether you wanted them or not. The woman working the snack bar at one o'clock on a weekday afternoon said the best deal on soft drinks was a small Coke product for \$3.37. It apparently is the one size that gives you unlimited refills.

Frankly it was a little like being at a major league ballpark. The bowlers are a captive audience so the prices are higher. Jean Whitney was my cohort for lunch, but we decided to split the burger as we wanted to try one more place and didn't want to fill up.



If this was two or three dollars cheaper for just a burger it might be in our running for top greasy spoon burger. The fries were nice and long but that causes the need to double dip, not a pleasant habit if you are sharing, but the snack bar lady provided two tubs of ketchup.

CARL'S DRIVE-IN Manchester Road at High School Drive in Brentwood. Jean Whitney did Carl's on her own. I ate at Carl's several times a week or more over six years when I was a young cop in Rock Hill. I got to know the second set of owners pretty well, Carl and Pat Meyers. Carl would show up and make Root Beer at 10 or 10:30 six days a week. Pat would show up at 11 o'clock for the lunch rush and head home to Kirkwood around 4. She would bring in delicious homemade clam chowder for lunchtime on Fridays during Lent.

At busy lunchtime, the grill was covered with hamburger patties. Back in the 1970's as I recall a burger was in the area of \$1 or maybe \$1.25. Foot long hotdogs were also a big seller. At lunch time they you could only get a steamed hot dog. But come in at 3 o'clock after the rush, Carl would split the hot dog down the middle and grill it. That was my favorite, especially with a thin line of Carl's Chili with no beans across the dog.



There is a counter on the east and one on the west side with eight stools on each side and separate entrances. They had curb service in the 1950s but that stopped when the Meyers bought the place. Parking on the back lot is tight enough without some teenagers with little money, making a night of it.

The place was perhaps most famous for the cold root beer sold in frosted mugs. In the late 60s when IBC was going out of business Carl was given the recipe and he started making his own. I wrote an article on Carl's in 1980 for St. Louis Magazine and he was fearful that the new IBC would see their name on his wooden root beer barrel and force him to remove it. It did not happen.

The place is now on its fourth owner, but very little has changed. The cigarette machine is gone as is the payphone. They added the delicious Ronnie's drumstick ice cream cones that are sold every summer at the Muni Opera for \$4 and frozen containers of Ted Drew's custard (\$3). Other than that nothing much has changed.



Jean went for lunch and per the deal had a burger. It met our specification. It was greasy and it was cheap (\$3). It looks exactly the same as the one from the 1970s, crispy on th edges. Here is what she wrote:

"It's like a swipe of hamburger grease on the bun, with ketchup, mayo, lettuce, tomato, onion--the way i ordered it. THE WEST side counter is cooler than the opposite, b/c the air vent blows onto it. The windows and door on that same cooler side have sun screens."

On our three stops for cheap greasy hamburgers, Carl's had the cheapest and the worst tasting burgers of the three. When you leave Carl's you clothes may smell like Carl's. Some people may like that greasy burger aroma. It didn't bother me for a number of years.

AND THE WINNER IS: THE VILLAGE BAR on Manchester in Des Peres east of Ballas Road has been around since 1948. It is located in a former feed store. It was slated to be shut down and the buildings torn down for a new strip center. But at the last minute it was saved. Now they have plans with the City of Des Peres to expand into the empty building next door that had been a wig shop. So don't waste any time. Get there before the construction starts.

Finding the door is tough for new comers. The building sits almost on Manchester Road. The entrance is in the rear and involves walking up some steps, going through the door and then taking a hard right followed by a left. The place is ironic like Carl's





In the early 1970s before I was 21, I was a police dispatcher for the Creve Coeur Police Department. We also dispatched 24-hours a day for Frontenac and Town and Country. At Des Peres when the midnight shift came on duty they threw a switch and the phones were transferred to Creve Coeur. I can never remember any trouble at the Village Bar.

Back in those days places like Bowling Alleys stayed open until 2 or 3 in the morning as they had bowling leagues for second shift workers. All bars had to close at 1:30. But back in those days there were not only second shifts but third shifts too and the Village Bar would open early for workers getting off the third shift. Second and third shifts are long gone today.

Jean Whitney and I showed up at about 2:30 on a weekday. There were a few people at the tables and a few at the bar. Jean had never been to the Village Bar and I was last there about eight years ago.

When we walked in the bartender shouted out, "Hey I thought we banned you from coming in here!" He then broke out in a big grin.

The burgers were \$4 and the cheeseburgers were \$4.50. There is a more expensive burger. It isn't bigger. it just comes on a deluxe bun. We ordered down and stayed

cheap. I got the cheeseburger and Jean got the burger. The patties were made by hand from fresh ground beef. It was evident when it came to taste.



I could not complain about a lack of cheese. The burgers were great and I have no idea why it took me so long to go back, other than the place is normally packed for dinner. The burgers were greasier than the ones at the bowling alley but they also tasted better and were cheaper. My wife and I returned last Monday and the cheap food was just as good.

The other treat was the home made onion rings. They are freshly made with buttermilk and flour when you order. \$4.50 for a half order and \$6.50 for a full order. These are as good as the o-rings at Charlotte's Web BBQ on Clayton Road at Kehrs Mill Road, at Cheeburger, Cheeburger and at Riverbend in Richmond Heights.



The Village Bar wins hands down over any "cheap bar burger" competition in the area.