



THE DRIVE-IN

WRITTEN by Mylie Lougheed

When Allan Anderson opened his Drive-In on July 5, 1956, Eisenhower was president, a first class stamp cost 3 cents, Rebel Without a Cause starring James Dean was in theaters and Elvis' "Don't Be Cruel/Hound Dog," single was #1.

While times have changed over the past 59 years, the Drive-In Restaurant still feels like 1956. Under the ownership of Wade and Carol Vitalis, the Drive-In has established itself as favorite of both locals and tourists and often tops the "Best of" lists for its homemade root beer and hand-packed burgers.

When the Vitalis' bought the Taylor's Falls, MN restaurant in 1988, they breathed new life into the property, creating a 1950's style drive-in that includes car hops, poodle skirts and nostalgic music that takes you back to another era. They also added an 18-hole miniature golf course, which adds to the family friendly atmosphere.

There is a history and strong ties for the Vitalis family to what is much more than a building. Wade Vitalis grew up in Taylors Falls and fondly remembers enjoying root beer and burgers at the restaurant where his sisters were hops in the 1970's. Today, Wade, Carol and their three children operate the "family business" in much the same fashion the Anderson family did in 1956, delivering fresh, high quality food in a fun and family friendly environment.

The Vitalis' expanded their operation to Grantsburg, Wisconsin in 2010. Under the direction of manager Tricia Jansen, who has worked for the Vitalis' for 13 years (she was 14 when she started), business is growing. Plans to add a mini-golf course are the works for a 2018 opening. This is all part of Vitalis's vision to have locations that mirror each other and provide great family friendly food and recreation. Along with the carhop service and patio dining, the Grantsburg location offers a fun 50's diner experience which allows the restaurant to operate a longer summer season.

You can often find classic cars parked at both locations, especially on weekend evenings. Cars were a big part of the 50's and cruising down to the local drive-in to hang out and maybe show off a little was common (ala American Graffiti). The Grantsburg Drive In hosts a classic car night every Saturday from 4-8 p.m. where collectors can shoot the breeze and talk shop and customers can enjoy seeing some great examples of classic American cars.

Jansen says she loves the classic car nights and how they really make it feel like you are back in the 50's and 60's. "Working at the Drive In from such a young age, I really fell in love with that era, the cars, the music and just the simplicity of things. I want to give people a place where they can go and even if for just one night, go back to that era."

Jansen is passionate about providing the complete old time drive in experience. "When you come to the Drive In, you get every aspect of that, the cars, the hops (even though we don't do it on roller skates), and the music," she says. "We have grandparents and parents that come and share with their families what it was like before cell phones, and microwaves."

Both locations are reasonable driving distance from the Twin Cities and have become popular destinations for families looking to eat great food while enjoying the St. Croix Riverway.

Taylors Falls is a small historic village nestled amongst the hills of the St. Croix River with a population of around 1,000. Visitors come to the area for the beautiful scenery, to walk the trails in the state park, ride the boat tours on the river and the many other recreational activities offered.

Grantsburg is known as the "Gateway to Crex Meadows" (the largest wildlife area in Wisconsin) and with a population of less than 1,400, is not much bigger than Taylors Falls. It has that same small town charm that makes it a perfect location for the Drive In's second location.

Both locations are easy to find, just look for the giant rotating mug of root beer!

What is so special about these restaurants that keep people coming back? Some say it's the homemade root beer served

in frosty mugs, others say it's the juicy handmade burgers that you just don't find anymore. If you ask Jansen, it's the whole package; the food, the friendly service, the small town atmosphere and the opportunity to take brief trip back in time to when things were simpler.

If you go: The Duke Burger is the signature burger. Get the basket and add a large mug of root beer and your tab will still be under \$11.00! If you are at the Grantsburg store, order the Frisco burger while you can. Served on fresh toasted bakery bread, this is a customer favorite. Jansen's favorite is the mushroom and swiss, served on texas toast with mushrooms sautéed to order. The crinkle fries are classic but if you want to change things up, try the fried green beans.

To view the restaurants and the menu, visit the website at www.taylorsfalls.com. //

TAYLORS FALLS, MN
572 Bench Street
651.465.7831

Open April thru October

GRANTSBURG, WI
133 State Hwy 70
715.463.2056

Open March thru November

THE DRIVE IN
RESTAURANT
An Original Since 1956
When the Drive-In opened in 1956, James Dean in Rebel Without A Cause, was showing at the St. Croix Theatre. The tradition of homemade rootbeer & fabulous food still lives on.

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