

Gehauf's Braddock Motor Inn



In the early years Gehauf's was Cumberland's other hot dog stand.

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

In 1949, Henry Gehauf built a small custard stand, with distinctive windows, along Route 40, in LaVale, Maryland. Featured items on the menu were 15-cent hotdogs, superdogs, super cheese dogs, french fries, toasted Pound Cake Sundae, Louisiana Po Boys, and thick milk shakes. A highlight for customers was “carhops,” complete with window trays, who would respond to blinking headlights in the parking lot. Gehauf's became the area's first drive-in restaurant and a landmark along Braddock's Road, as residents and travelers continue to enjoy the hospitality services offered there for 55 years.

Henry Gehauf's restaurant experience began in 1936, at Troxell's Soda Fountain, located on the corner of Baltimore and South Mechanic Streets, in Cumberland. His duties at the soda fountain created an interest in owning his own business. That dream was realized in 1948 when he purchased three acres of land that converged at Route 40 and Winchester Road. A family trip to Kansas City, Kansas, provided inspiration on what type of restaurant he would establish there.

Building on the site was not an easy task, as both major highways were built 12 feet above Mr. Gehauf's ground

level. Turning from either road, down a steep incline, would not have provided a customer friendly access for the drive-in restaurant he envisioned. To compensate for differences in elevation, Mr. Gehauf first poured the footer for his building at existing ground level. When foundation blocks reached the first floor, a ladder became necessary, so he could reach the work area to nail floorboards. Loads of fill dirt were then emptied at the site and landscaped against foundation walls, until ground level at Gehauf's first floor, was the same as surrounding road levels. After much hard work during an especially cold winter, Gehauf's opened for business in 1949.

Mr. Gehauf's business instincts were reliable, as he understood the importance of automobiles in the affluent post World War II era. According to Dave Gehauf, son of Henry Gehauf and current owner, “The idea my father had here really fit the times. The early 1950's were a time of optimism for young people who used our restaurant. We have happy memories about the original concept. One day we posted a sign informing customers to stay clear of a watchdog that dad posted at night. The sign said, ‘Vicious Dog.’ Sure enough, customers started coming in and ordering a Vicious Dog and shake.”

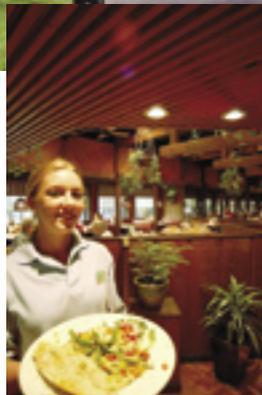
Hotdogs and shakes sales were successful for the first few years, so plans were made to expand the original drive-in concept. Prior to the development of an interstate highway through Allegany County, virtually all east-west travel was along Braddock Road. Mr. Gehauf's business instincts once again proved to be reliable when, in 1954, he built eight rooms, for overnight guests, adjacent to his small restaurant. Gehauf's became affiliated with Best Western International in 1971. Improvements continued over the years, including major ones beginning in 1974 that replaced the original motel units with an expansive complex that today includes an indoor swimming pool, covered skyways, and a cedar exterior.

More than 55 years after the custard stand opened, Dave Gehauf oversees a hotel complex that includes Gehauf's Restaurant, Henny's Grill and Bar, and the Braddock Motor Inn, a Best Western Hotel. Recognition for the Braddock Motor Inn in recent years has included featured appearances among the nation's best properties, as compiled by Lodging Hospitality magazine, feature coverage for interior design in Best Western International promotional videos, and design recognition from the State of Maryland. While the small custard stand with distinctive windows is just a memory for residents and long time guests, the spirit and service of Gehauf's original venture remains very much alive at Braddock Motor Inn in LaVale. www.bestwesternbraddock.com



Above: Gehauf's today is beautiful inside and out — no longer a drive-in, but still serving a variety of hot dogs.

Right: Warm interior, friendly service and good food prepared well.



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