



BY THE AUTHOR
OF 'THE
DINER'
COLLEEN
BEASLEY

by Benjamin Margalit/Margalit Studio
At Uniontown's popular *Lake Varsity Diner*, founders Joe and Colleen Beasley treat guests to Certified Angus Beef gourmet steak burgers, fresh-cut French fries, homemade potato chips and delicious frozen treats. And they serve them in a spotless, non-smoking environment reminiscent of a classic 1950s style diner. But their customers are not who they thought they'd be. See [story.nara.5](#)

COVER STORY

Uniontown diner offers true Americana experience

by Mimi Vanderhaven

Although many in the Baby Boom Generation are too young to remember the 1950s-style diner featuring burgers, fries, shakes and Chuck Berry on the jukebox, they have seen enough *Happy Days* re-runs to know what one feels like. And with "retro" in vogue and crowds flocking to the mall for the Johnny Rockets experience, we all seem to crave the comfort of Americana.

But thanks to one local family, you don't have to fight the mall traffic to enjoy the All-American dining experience.

Last October, Joe and Colleen Beasley, boomers themselves, opened their *Lake Varsity Diner* in Uniontown in the hopes of attracting local teens to the same experience they enjoyed as teenagers — but it hasn't worked out that way.

"We thought our customers would be younger people looking for a great place to hang out," Joe explains. "Sure, we get a lot of kids, but we're really seeing more adults — from twenty-somethings to seniors — and lots of families."

Already, darling, Joe and Colleen have changed their operation to reflect this different customer segment. "When we first opened, customers placed their order at the front counter like at a fast food place," Colleen explains. "But now we seat you first and our servers take care of you at your table, like a traditional restaurant."

And because *Lake Varsity Diner's* focus is on fresh, quality ingredients instead of lower quality frozen ingredients used at fast



Uniontown's Lake Varsity Diner makes its burgers from Certified Angus Beef and its thirty-sliced, French fries are fresh-cut daily.

The Halfback Bacon-N-Cheddar, for example, the restaurant's best selling gourmet hamburger, features apple butter.

"When people see it on the menu they sometimes ask us to hold the apple butter," Joe smiles. "But later they come back, try it, and ask for extra apple butter the next time they come in."

Lake Varsity's premium burger, the Halfback Portobello Alfredo, is a half-pound Black Angus steak burger topped with breaded portobello mushroom fingers, loaded with Asiago cheese and the family's signature Alfredo sauce. Then it's topped with shredded parmesan cheese. Of course you can always order a traditional burger with fresh lettuce, tomato, pickles and your choice of condiments.

All the Certified Black Angus burgers are seasoned with Joe's and Colleen's secret spices, but they wouldn't share that secret with Mimi. It may be this secret seasoning which helped *Lake Varsity Diner* win the 2006 *Taste of Our Town Award* for the area's best hamburger.

The menu also features chicken sandwiches, fish sandwiches, shrimp, chicken wings, and, of course, hot dogs. You can even find fresh salads. And beyond the fresh-cut french fries (called *Couch Potatoes*), look for homemade potato chips.

At the end (or maybe at the beginning) you'll want to try the diner's signature desserts like the Blue Streak Cheesecake, the Lake Shake, the Rookie Sundae or the Brain Freeze, which is so big the menu encourages you to share it with a friend.

But not all the family's focus is on quality food and large portions. It's also on creating a fun, spotless environment. They have re-created exactly a classic American diner featuring black and white tile floors and chrome chairs with classic metallic vinyl cushions. The jukebox plays classics from the 1950s through today's pop music. The tables are covered with high school sports memorabilia from local newspapers and high school yearbooks going back to the 1950s.

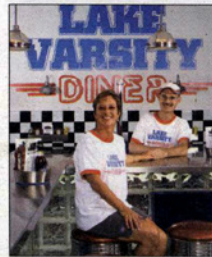
"Before we opened we ran an ad in the local paper looking for yearbooks and old newspaper clippings, and people sent in thousands of them," explains Joe. "The really fun part is when a customer comes in and finds a photo of themselves on one of our tables. It's quite a nostalgic feeling, but it's also exciting for them and for us."

Lake Varsity Diner also boasts two flat screen television for watching sports. "We wanted the Americana dining feeling," says Colleen, "but we also wanted to create a sports bar feel for kids and families."

That "family feel" is reinforced by the fact that *Lake Varsity Diner* doesn't serve alcohol and is totally non-smoking. To a large extent, the restaurant is the

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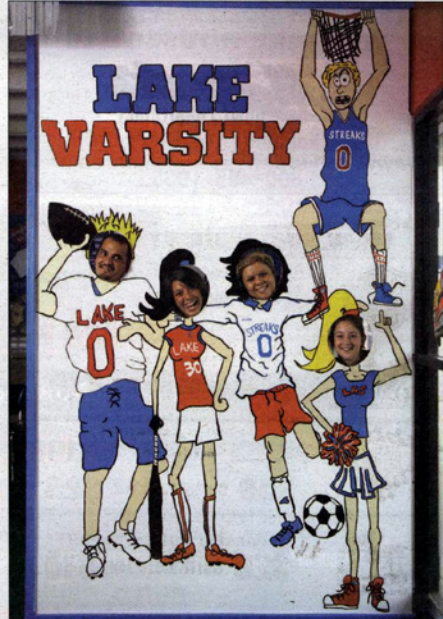
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by Benjamin Margalit/Margalit Studio

on the cover

Colleen and Joe Beasley offer gourmet burgers, fries and more at their popular *Lake Varsity Diner* in Uniontown.



by Benjamin Margalit/Margalit Studio

(Left to right) *Lake Varsity Diner* kitchen manager and head chef Juan De Jesus, server Molly Beasley, supervisor Angela Murdock and guest Danielle Margalit, daughter of Mimi photographer Benjamin Margalit.

Lake Varsity Diner

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result of Joe Beasley's varied career — and a lot of prayer. He worked for 18 years in the food business and did a stint selling sports memorabilia. He later became involved in landscaping and construction, but was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis which put an end to his home building career. "I returned to what I'm most comfortable with," Joe insists. "And that's the food business. Serving high quality food is what we do best, and getting to know so many wonderful customers, vendors and others has been the real bonus for our entire family."

Joe and Colleen's children, Angela, Molly and Andy, also work at the diner.

Right now during lunch from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Lake Varsity Diner is offering its Quarterback Burger with all the trimmings of its Gourmet Burger selection for only a dollar more. That means you can enjoy even the top-selling Halfback Bacon-N-Cheddar for only \$4.99, including Couch Potatoes which are complimentary with every meal.

When you go, be sure to enjoy an ice cold Pepsi product, put a few coins in the jukebox for old times sake, and look for your own photo gracing a table top somewhere in the diner.

It just might be there, darling.

Lake Varsity Diner is located at 13367 Cleveland Ave. N. W. about 1/4 mile north of 619 in Uniontown. The phone number is 330-699-DINE (3463). Hours are Monday to Thursday 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 11 a.m. - 10 p.m.; closed Sundays.

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Lake Varsity Diner owner Joe Beasley

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