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BEST BURGER

The sandwich that made New Buffalo famous

Your guide to fun in the region

MEMORIAL DAY 2017

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DESTINATION DINING

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Redamak's a must-visit coastal restaurant for more than 70 years

STORY TED YOAKUM **PHOTOGRAPHY** WES JERDON

For most American restaurants, hamburgers are a staple on the menu, an old standby that is sure to please even the pickiest of eaters.

For the staff of Redamak's, though, burgers are not simply a go-to dish — they are religion.

For more than 70 years, the New Buffalo burger joint has made its name on serving juicy beef patties nestled between two perfectly toasted buns to hungry patrons. The establishment's dedication to the bun has made it a destination for burger aficionados across the area, as the restaurant's logo sports the phrase "The hamburger that made New Buffalo famous."

"We truly believe we bring a lot of people to town," said owner Chuck Maroney. "We are proud to make that claim."

In spite of their demand, there is no special ingredient or trick that makes the restaurant's burgers so irresistible to customers — the magic is all in the love and dedication the kitchen pours into each beef-and-bun masterpiece.

The staff cuts and grinds its beef on the premises, painstakingly forming the ground chuck into patties before searing them on the stove. The cooked beef is then topped with fresh, locally sourced ingredients, placed between two buns and sent out to the eagerly waiting customer.





George and Gladys Redamak established Redamak's in the 1940s. From early in the restaurant's life, the Redamak burger became the trademark of the restaurant, with the owners purchasing the beef for the dish from a butcher in town.

Maroney has been an adherent to the power of the Redamak's patty since he was a child. He and his family frequented the New Buffalo restaurant during their summer trips to the city from their home in Chicago, spending their Friday nights enjoying the restaurant's perch, Maroney said.

"As a treat, my parents would let me get a burger to go along with our meal," he said.

The Maroney family became friends with George and Gladys — a relationship that laid the groundwork for the next chapter of the restaurant's life.

"My dad [James] would always joke with Gladys, after her husband died in 1973, that one day he was going to end up owning the joint," Maroney said. "Sure enough, she called him in 1974 to tell him she was ready to sell."

As she and her late husband's name was still attached to the business, Gladys was very particular in who she wanted to pass the reins to. James and his wife, Angie, were among only three people the woman considered selling the business to, Maroney said.

Recognizing the responsibility they were handed, the couple set out to maintain the same level of quality Redamak's delivered to customers after they acquired the business in 1975. In spite of their family's lack of experience in the restaurant business, Jim and Angie poured their hearts and souls into the

business, transforming it from a small mom and pop restaurant to a destination that can seat 300 customers and employs 190.

The restaurant has expanded several times throughout the last 42 years, including the installation of a new kitchen, bar area and two patios. Throughout all the expansions, though, the restaurant maintains the same knotty pine-style paneling as it had when it first opened, which gives it a quaint, small-town diner feel, Maroney said.

Maroney has worked at the restaurant himself since 1975, joining after he graduated high school that year. He currently owns the business, along with his wife, Linda, and brother, James L., who took over following the death of James in 2013 and Angie in 2014.

"We have seen so many people over the last 42 years," Maroney said. "Grandkids, great-grandkids — generations of families."

The owners have made some expansions to the menu in recent months, adding a new selection of gourmet burgers to the mix, as well as sliders — smaller burgers customers can eat several of in one meal. They are also planning to overhaul the kitchen in the fall, updating the equipment and heating/cooling systems, Maroney said.

Whether it is the great, freshly prepared food, the nostalgic dining experience or the friendly service, customers keep marking Redamak's as a place to stop during their trips to the coast — something Maroney and his family have no intention of ending any time soon.

"It takes tradition to be a legend," he said.

