

# Portage Today

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## WESTLAKE DRIVE-IN ENTERS ITS 29TH SEASON

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In April 1963, J.F.K. was in the White House, the Beatles were about to get a recording contract, and nobody had heard of Viet Nam. The Berlin Wall was brand new, and Jim Mendham was working in a paper mill.

Jim knew the mill was going to close soon and he needed to find another line of work. He then built what is now West Lake Drive-In, and Jim and his wife, Arliss, took over making hamburgers the next year.

"That was about 2000 years ago," says Jim, who was working the counter on this sunny April afternoon. Arliss was in the back peeling onions. She had just finished sorting tomatoes. "The only way to get good vegetables is to keep on the suppliers, and don't chill the tomatoes," Arliss remarked.

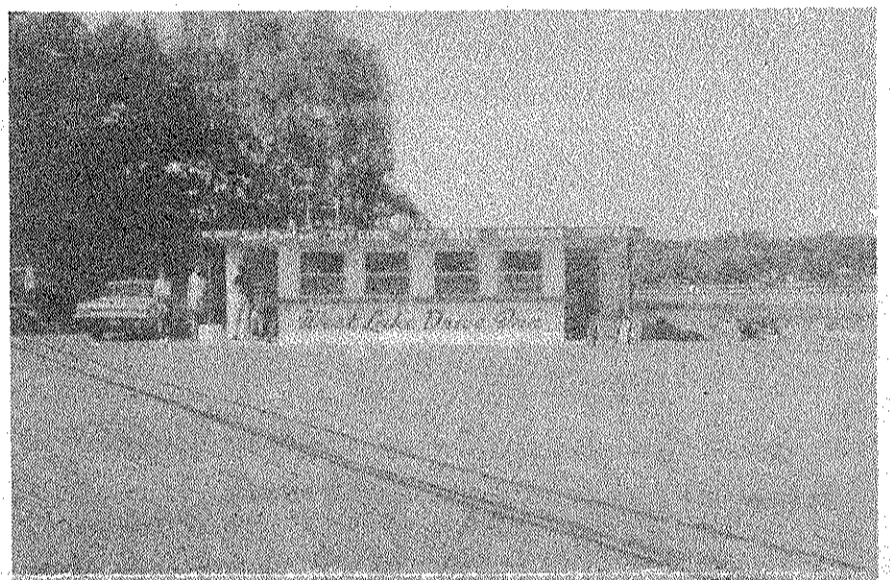
Son Jeff took over the business in 1987, but Jim and Arliss are still there lending a hand. Their daughters Barbara and Nancy are there too; they have been all along. They make the chili that makes those chili dogs perfect. They do much more than that, though. Jeff started on the grill on day one, when he was 12 years old. He is still at the grill 29 years later.

Jim and Arliss have two other children. Jimmy, who never worked at the drive-in, works for General Motors; and Bonnie, who is at Upjohn now, but, was a carhop one year before she got that job.

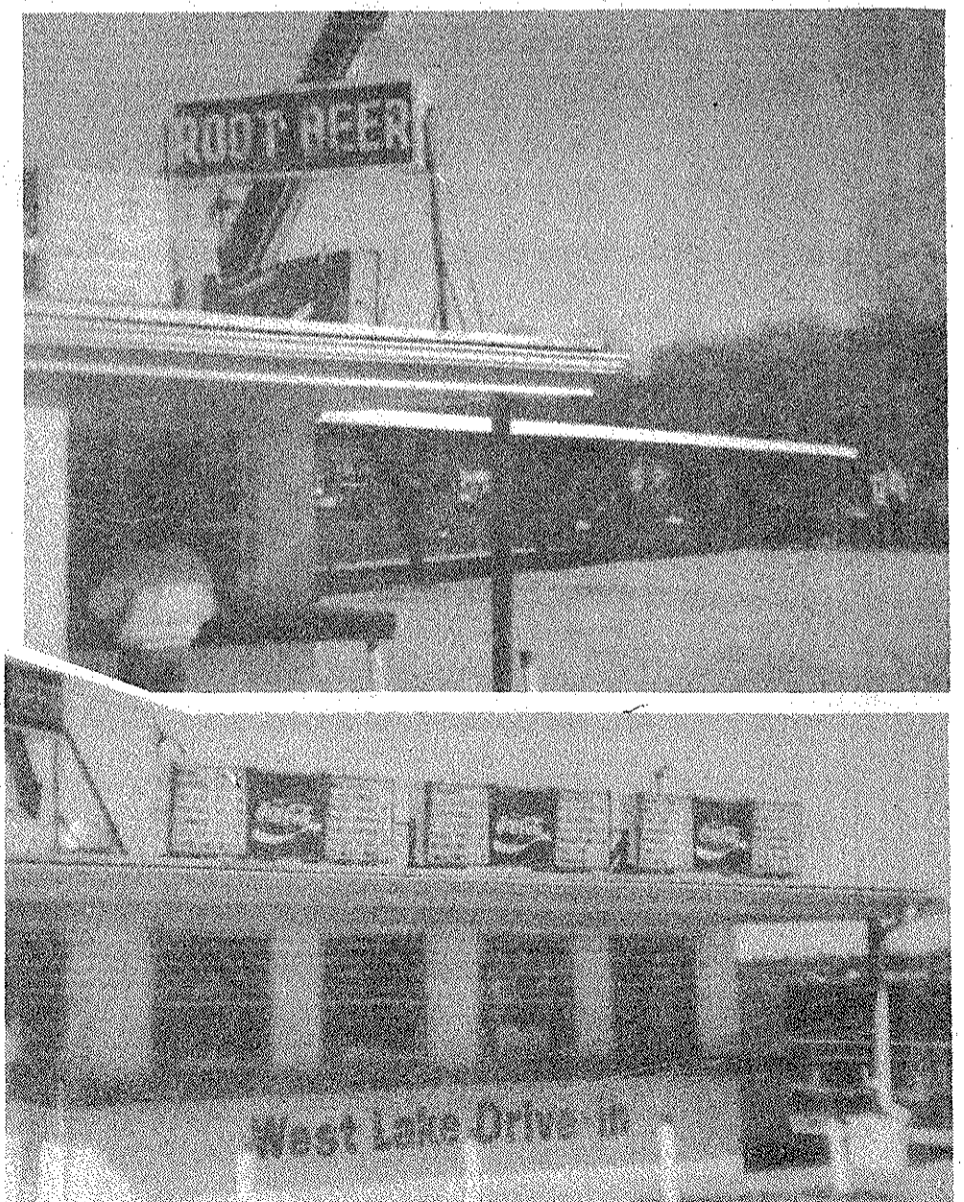
It has been a family operation all along, that is reflected in the good food. That is why everybody can't wait until the season opens. April 15 is usually opening day. "We clean and paint for a month before," explains Arliss. She seems to be in charge, especially when it comes to quality service.

When they opened in '63, there was a gas station right next door, Harding's Grocery across the street, and Charron's was R & J Variety. They added the canopy and the intercom in 1968. They used to make their own root beer, but stopped. That's okay, just keep making those great Double Olive Cheese Deluxe burgers, and don't change a thing for at least another 29 years.

And, by the way, Jim and Arliss don't spend their winters vacationing in Florida, like we all thought. They spend the cold season in a much nicer place, "We go up North, around Newago."



BUILDING WESTLAKE DRIVE-IN



WESTLAKE DRIVE-IN TODAY

