

A Success Story



Steak n Shake is spotted by the familiar black and white building. This is one of four Steak n Shake restaurants and drive-ins in St. Louis.

A few days ago, a Steak n Shake executive close to A. H. (Gus) Belt, founder and chairman of the board of the \$3,000,000 Steak n Shake restaurant chain in Illinois, Indiana, Arkansas and Missouri, asked an older Bloomington businessman, what he thought was the reason for the fabulous success of Steak n Shake.

"Good food served in a hurry by courteous people," was his reply.

If Mr. Belt had been present, he probably would have been amazed at the comment.

In so many words, that is exactly the kind of restaurant he described to another local businessman when he opened the first Steak n Shake here in 1932.

• • •
The depression was hanging over American business like a black cloud in 1932.

Gus Belt and his wife, Edith, were operating the Shell Inn, a gasoline station and restaurant at Main and Virginia Streets—now home of the original Steak n Shake Drive-In.

He was going broke.

He decided to stake everything left on a plan he had been mulling several months. He would open a short order restaurant combining two features — good food and fast service.

Mr. Belt dropped his dinner menu and bought his first 10 pounds of the best ground beef in town. Almost overnight, he had switched to short orders—steakburgers (they had yet to become famous), chili, French fries and malted milk shakes.

His business has boomed from that day.

• • •
Today, Gus Belt is head of a restaurant chain conservatively estimated worth \$3,000,000 and still growing.

The 29th Steak n Shake restaurant opened in St. Louis last week. At least, five more are scheduled to open before summer is over.

Steak n Shake operates on the same philosophy Mr. Belt had in mind when he opened the first one. Food from the ground beef to the mustard is the best quality on the market.

The menu is a little longer now, but basically the same!

Steakburgers that cover the bun, chili and chili-mac; Boston baked beans, French fries, salad — but only a lettuce-tomato combination; pie—but only cherry and apple, except on holidays; sundaes—but only chocolate and pineapple; malted milk shakes with Steak n Shake's own ice cream, and Hires root beer among other soft drinks.

• • •
What is the Steakburger?

To ask that question, is to volunteer for a tour through the Steak n Shake Commissary at the home office at 1700 W. Washington St., Bloomington.

In a giant refrigerator hung with rows of frozen beef sides, one man is busy every day stripping off

meat. The sides all bear a government inspected stamp and the stamp of top quality beef from the Cudahay Packing House at Omaha, Neb., where all Steak n Shake meat is purchased.

These chunks of beef—potential T-bone steaks, prime roast ribs and filet mignons—are tossed into the grinder along with meat from the neck brisket and legs—the parts that are usually ground for most ground beef.

The Steakburger — exclusive with Steak n Shake now—is made of ground meat from the entire beef carcass and nothing is added.

Steak n Shake has served the same sandwich from the beginning.

• • •
The buns were also an experiment for perfection.

Steak n Shake wanted a bun with crust on all sides. So a baker in Bloomington designed a special pan to turn out buns with a complete crust.

Chili concentrate is made in giant vats at the commissary. The recipe is a trade secret.

Ice cream is produced at 1,300 gallons a day also in the Commissary here. Each month, a carton in a plain wrapper is mailed to the University of Illinois for grading. It rates with the best ice cream sold anywhere.

Paper napkins and straws are freighted into Bloomington by the box car loads.

• • •

Steak n Shake hires more than 300 persons now. Every employee is trained in a series of schools conducted in a training restaurant equipped on the top floor of the Commissary.

A college professor was hired this year for the sole job of managing and mothering the teenage car hops. He travels from town to town, keeping peace and producing work from the teenagers.

The long range policy of hiring has paid dividends. Some of the top managers with the company now, started as car hops.

A liberal monthly bonus system puts extra cash in the pay envelopes of the personnel regularly. Surplus funds are distributed among employees in proportion to their salaries.