

Greene's

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cludes a famous Detroit Piston for throwing pickles all over the place.

To receive Hazel's quick thumb was something of a badge of honor. It's also part of the Greene's legend. So, too, is downing massive quantities of cholesterol-laden burgers, whose fried onions intoxicate the taste buds and could turn a militant vegetarian into a collaborating carnivore.

Fetching a bagful

Greene's Hamburgers, named after former owner Joe Greene, opened in May of 1957. Little has changed over the years. For Farmington-area residents, the solitary white edifice has become an institution.

It's a place where people came after school or a night on the town. Some used to fetch a bagful for their dad.

A few would even admit their first taste of a Greene's burger came while in jail. Greene's cuisine is the official food of the Farmington police lock-up.

Testimonials are as vivid as those at a travelling church revival.

Ellyn Damiani said her first date with her husband, Craig, was at Greene's. He threatened to have their wedding reception there.

Howard Zacks of Farmington Hills stops by for breakfast on Monday before his weekly journey to Chicago where he's an associate dean of business at National-Louis University; he's back on Friday nights to eat hamburgers on the way home.

"I just like the fact that it's old fashion," said Mary Golich of Farmington Hills. "It's the same as when I was a little girl. It's the same grease on the burgers."

The 'drink crowd' comes Early Saturday morning — after the bars have closed — Greene's is transformed into something more than a place to feed a face.

The serene hum from an ice machine switches to the extreme buzz of too many icy beers. Waitresses call it the "drink crowd." The burgers become sponges to



Saying a mouthful: Harrison High alums chow down on burgers and fries at Greene's as grads Tom Conlon (left), Mike Inch and Dennis Romps chat with Tom Victory and Patrick Rogers, also Harrison grads. Rogers and friend Mono Baca (not pictured) ate nothing but french fries.

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Mary Golich
of Farmington Hills

soak up the excess; the wafting onions become smelling salts.

Those behind the counter smile at the inebriated, out-of-kilter observations and blush at the alcohol-enriched adulation. But all up, and they're shipped out.

One older man slides up to a woman, who is sitting by herself. He questions her presence.

"Either you're a cameraman," he said without prompting, "or a whore."

With that, he was told to pay up and leave. He asked for a burger to go; they refused.

Alisa Thompson's tone would make Hazel proud. She's been at Greene's for 15 years. The night shift is her domain, with the help of co-workers Brenda Harvey and Angel Ryan.

Harvey, who is originally from Elizabethton, Tenn., hovers over

the grill. She liberally applies the trademark onions, squashing them into a mulch with a spatula.

When things pick up at the carry-out window, the three women form an assembly line: Harvey cooks, Ryan drops three pickles on each burger and Thompson wraps them.

More relaxed at night

They say there's a different pace at night. Customers are more relaxed, more willing to talk about family, work and, occasionally, sex.

"That's how Angel got educated," said Thompson chiding her younger co-worker with a laugh. Later, one remark about how cute a particular Farmington Hills police officer is. "He's got cute legs, Brenda," one said.

Most customers are spoken

about with reverence. They mention the "breakfast boys" and the soccer players who drop in Monday nights to eat, sing and dance.

The mood is one of frivolity as evidenced by one regular, who initiates a tense-looking stranger with an unsolicited neck and back rub.

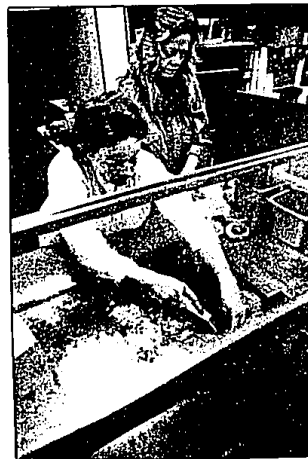
"My dad's a chiropractor," he said.

Those who work there may provide the food, but customers' happiness appears to nourish their spirits.

As more pour in after 2 a.m., Greene's workers welcome the onslaught. Ryan drops a couple of quarters into the jukebox as the Righteous Brothers' "Unchained Melody" rises above the chatter and the sizzle of the grill.

The fluorescent-lighted eatery steps back in time.

"No matter where you go at night," said Annie Slasor of Farmington Hills, preparing to launch her teeth into a plateful, "you always end up at Greene's."



Hamburger helpers: Brenda Harvey (left) and Alisa Thompson have worked a combined 27 years at Greene's.

Ketchup on memories: Julie Chamberlin grew up in nearby Bel-Aire subdivision. She and her husband, Bill, now residents of Keego Harbor, stop by for a bite.



Story-line: At right, P.J. McDonald laughs while Erik Meyer tells an animated story. Above left, Farmington Hills police officer Michael Simkow comes into the "to go" counter at Greene's for Diet Coke two or three times a night. Above right, Angel Ryan has worked at Greene's six years.



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