

# SUN SAILOR

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## Remade drive-in offers more than food to residents of St. Louis Park

ALEXANDRA WERTZ • SUN NEWSPAPERS

You don't have to be from Chicago to crave a Vienna Beef hotdog. St. Louis Park was home to an icon that served greasy and delicious food for more than 58 years.

Wagner's Drive-In off of Highway 7 catered to sweaty sports teams on summer nights, older couples yearning for the good ol' drive-in days and neighborhood families and dogs.

But this past May, Wagner's was replaced by Galaxy Drive-In, a venue that may catch your eye before your taste buds.

Model airplanes hang from the purple and blue roof, Dr. Seuss trees and statues make up its perimeter, and giant games of tic-tac-toe and chess welcome children to play as parents finish up their meals.

In Steve Schussler's words, Galaxy was an "intergalactic retro futuristic makeover." Schussler, who also founded the Rainforest Cafe, came up with the restaurant's distinct theme in hopes of meeting the challenge of taking over a beloved icon.

"The responsibility of taking over an icon is huge. But it's an awesome responsibility, and I think we passed the test," he said.

Community, accessibility and innovation are Galaxy's values. For 27 years, Schussler admired what Wagner's did for the community and wanted to take it up a notch with his new ideas.

Community is accentuated by Galaxy's effort to keep good relations with its neighbors. The area has definitely seen an increase in business and cars over the last month, bringing with it more traffic and noise. But Galaxy does its part.

"We wanted to make a statement," Schussler said.

"Before we start our day, we get everybody together in the mornings and vacuum the streets for cigarette butts and garbage."

"We are very aware we have more traffic on the streets. We're addressing it. I've tried to meet 85 percent of the people on the block, talk to them and invite them for dinner."

Despite an increase in traffic, there is a definite increase in customers and satisfaction.

"It's more inviting, more upbeat," said customer Donna Guillory. "The atmosphere makes you want to sit outside rather than in your car."

Galaxy also promotes community by providing s'mores kits for its large fire pits. The kits come with s'mores ingredients in addition to a song sheet with camp songs.

As far as accessibility, Schussler made intentional moves to cater to his customers.

"The coolest thing is the fact that we have a men's room and ladies' room that are handicapped accessible in addition to changing stations. We wanted it to be very accessible."

Another one of Galaxy's services is traffic control, with employees on rollerblades.

"I like the reaction I get when I approach cars on rollerblades; I get laughs," summer employee Max Miller said. "And I never fall. I'm a professional."

Another important part of replacing an icon for Schussler was taking an innovative approach.

"We have to be forward-thinkers. That's where the future's going so we're looking at all of that. We're taking a very proactive approach."

Going forward, Galaxy will work on incorporating solar energy into the restaurant.

Some icons can never be replaced. But Galaxy is working hard to cater to a fast-food drive-in tradition that St. Louis Park members crave.

"Not only are our colors great, but people still come in with a smile. To me that says we succeeded," Schussler said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Capturing the look and feel of an earlier era was the goal for Steve Schussler when he turned Wagner's Drive-In into Galaxy Drive-In.