

# The Port a safe haven

By Laura Paul-Hatcher

Correspondent

CHESTERTON — After a long day in the dunes, hungry customers, with sand still in their shoes can stop for a chili dog and root beer at The Port Drive-In, said co-owner Beth Gassoway.

"There aren't many drive-ins left," said Gassoway, who runs the business along with her husband, Terry.

"It's actually getting to the point where people come in who have never been to a drive-in before. They say, 'Oh, you hook the trays on the windows and bring food to the car.'"

A family-owned business since 1957, Gassoway said, The Port is the oldest business in Chesterton under the same ownership.

"This is an original," she said. "This is the way it was in the '50s. I like to tell people we are a living museum with our rotary phone, juke box and neon signs."

## PORTER COUNTY BUSINESS FOCUS

Gassoway said The Port still sells homemade root beer in chilled mugs and chili dogs made from a secret family recipe.

"The chili was developed by Elsie Gassoway, Terry's mother, in the '50s and is still the recipe we use," she said. "It's a well-guarded secret. My husband is the only one who knows how to make it."

The menu has expanded since the business opened and today includes more than 50 sandwiches, homemade soups and ice-cream.

Tracey Hall, 26, a waitress at The Port since she was 16, said customers like the authentic feel of the restaurant.

"People my age saw this kind of thing on 'Happy Days,'" said Hall of the long-running television show now in syndication.

She said many of the waitresses deliver orders on roller skates.

"I don't do the skating," said Hall. "I'm afraid to skate, but the other girls get pretty good tips and customers think it's pretty neat."

Gassoway said The Port is open March through October. During the off-season, she and her husband "head to the mountains" to go skiing.

"The fun part is when we close for the winter and come back each year," said Gassoway. "It's fun to see our loyal customers. It's like greeting old friends."

Gassoway said the greatest challenge of her business is training teenagers. "This is the first job for many of them," she said. "We try to teach the work ethic; this is the real world."

Taking a bit of a step into the 1990s, Gassoway said the dining room "went completely smoke-free this year."

"It was a very '90s thing to do, but we decided it was time for that," she said.

## for memories of the '50s



Beth Gassoway hands an order to Mandy Baugh at The Port Drive-in. Chili dogs, root beer and waitresses on roller skates are a new experience for many Chesterton visitors.

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