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Interview with David Body

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David Body

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Event: Interview with David Body
Place: Alcove Restaurant and Lounge, Mt. Vernon

CM: This is Chris Meyers interview David Body, the owner of the Alcove Restaurant downtown in Mt. Vernon, and it is February 22nd, and we are in the Alcove. So I guess if you could start by talking a little bit about how you got involved...

DB: Oh...in the restaurant?

CM: Ah...in the restaurant itself.

DB: Um...yeah. My family – my cousin used to own it, and I worked for him, and at the time I also used to work construction, and that was in the 80's, and there wasn't a lot of work, so, in construction, so I kept coming back to the restaurant, and then I worked in Florida for a while, and I worked in restaurants, so I ended up going to culinary school. Graduated from there, worked for Marriott, and then I moved back to the area and I got a job. Came back to work here...worked with the previous owner, and then I purchased it.

CM: So you went to culinary school in Florida?

DB: No...in Hawking.

CM: ok.

DB: Hawking technical college.

CM: So did you grow up in the community...

DB: Yes...grew up in the community, yes.

CM: Has the restaurant been in your family for a while, or do you know anything about...

DB: I know the history of it. It's been...it was started as Candyland in 1911, um, and it was located here, then they moved next door. As it was Candyland, they had a room called the alcove room. Ah...the Alcove room became ever more popular, because they were serving meals and whatnot. This building was built in...they moved out of it, moved next door, this building was built 37 to 39 and they moved back into this building, was built specifically for a restaurant, and that's when they changed the name from Candyland to the Alcove. And that one owner had it...Serlices had started it, they gave it, passed it on to their son, and it was sold, I think in 72 to Richard Cochran, he had it for 11 years...he sold it in 83 to Tom Metcalf, ah, Mr. Metcalf owned it until '99, and then he sold it to my wife and I Kathy. So there's been four owners.

CM: This Metcalf is your cousin?

DB: No. Rich Cochran was my cousin. I had worked for him, and then I...I said I

CM: He sold it...

DB: To him and then I came...I moved back to Mt. Vernon, I worked for ah, at that time he had sold it and I was able to get a job for um, Tom Metcalf.

CM: So has the restaurant gone through any major...I mean you said it's physical transition, I mean actually it was moved into this building, but has it gone through, has it looked pretty much the same in terms of the type of food, in terms of that kind of stuff?

DB: Yeah...that's been the same. The one thing...in the 50's there was a bar upstairs. When the building was originally built, it was open. Where the lobby is now, that was open to the second floor, and there was a balcony around it.

CM: Oh, ok.

DB, And it had this same type of molding, with the crown and whatnot. That was closed off, um, early on, because it just wasn't practical. And then in ah, the fifties, there was a bar upstairs, but they wouldn't serve alcohol down here around the ladies. So the gentlemen would go upstairs to get their alcohol, and bring their drinks down, and it was not served in the dining room, but they came down. And in the sixties – '63 is when the lounge was added. And at the time, in the fifties, the place was...a lot of people would stop on their way from Columbus, and this was the place to eat. So it was quite famous. They would do, oh, six hundred people, which is a lot.

CM: It is.

DB: Yeah, um, now, on a good night, like a Kenyon weekend, we may do three hundred. But, um, in a typical Saturday is 200, but a lot of that was Ohio State. If you go to a generation, I would – that're in their seventies now, in Ohio, they'll remember the Alcove if they had any connection with OSU.

CM: So that's...

DB: Yeah...at one time it was quite famous, with that, you know with that generation, it was known throughout the state.

CM: So, you mentioned that you went from construction into culinary school – have you always had an interest in cooking, or did that...

DB: No, it just. I just ended up in restaurants – it was the only job available. And I had...I never had a burning desire.

Break

DB: Um, and the ah...there was no jobs, so I just kept ending up working in restaurants on and off and my father said, 'you might want to go to culinary school or something', so that's how I ended up...

CM: So do you still do any cooking here?

DB: Yeah...a little bit. I'd say about 30% of my time is spent cooking.

CM: Oh wow...and mostly...

DB: The rest is just management, yeah...scheduling, problem solving.

CM: How do you see the Alcove's significance either right now or in history or both, I mean in the community....

DB: Very significant in years past, and becoming less so. But it was the place to go in town at one time. Just...there wasn't a lot of restaurants, and people didn't eat out as much, and it was...it's still. You have, the service clubs meet here. It's still recognized in downtown, so, as a place to meet and whatnot.

CM: What do you think specific, I mean, socially, the significance is, outside of, I mean maybe in terms of the formalized groups, why they would choose to meet here, or in terms of families in general, or families in general...in terms of the downtown area...

DB: ok...why they would meet here? As far as just customers, or the groups?

CM: Either...

DB: Ah, I think the, ah, mainly the business clubs, a lot of them work downtown and a lot it is just tradition. Um, I wish I could answer the other question – I don't know. Because if I could, I could market the place better. That's tough. I don't know if a lot of our business is from people – special events – that sort of thing. I don't know if it is because we're located downtown, if that's the reason, or the business itself. I don't know.

CM: Do you see, um, a trend in what's happening with the downtown area...is that directly connected to how popular the Alcove has been at any time, and what's happening with the strip...?

DB: Yes...yeah, yeah, it's affected us. It will be interested to see when the restaurant Jake's opens, because they weren't able to serve alcohol out on the East end, and yeah, I see a shift of people like in downtown. So it's...it's changed. There was a lot in the a fifties and the sixties almost all of the business was done downtown...and now there's not much at all. It's become more offices. We still have a courthouse...we get a lot of lunch trade from their office people, but not much retail. I...I would not have any customers not even one percent that have come downtown to shop and went to eat.

Where as...I would say in the fifties and sixties you were probably looking at 30-40% of your business was women, or someone shopping downtown and then eating at the restaurant, whereas that's not the case anymore.

CM: How do you think restaurants in general downtown right now maybe...or eating places of any sort are important to the community. I mean...why go out to eat?

DB: Why go out to eat? I...I don't know. I think it's just a form of entertainment. I think some of it is to see people...to meet people. Here it is...that's a case of that. Um...I have a lot of repeat customers that may come not planning to meet someone, but expecting to see someone. At lunch there is a lot of business done in here of people just coming in and they'll see someone and say, 'oh...by the way I needed to speak to you.' So...ah...this restaurant especially has a lot of that...going on.

CM: Do you see a lot of business meetings and that sort of...

DB: Yes, yeah. And we also have informal business meetings, where someone will encounter someone and something will be picked up from that.

CM: And is that mostly with downtown businesses, or...

DB: Yeah...some of it involves downtown business...we see some business from the industrial park. Um...but a lot it's just downtown as far as just services...different businesses – you know.

CM: And what sorts of...I mean...It seems to me like each restaurant has it's group of people that generally goes to their restaurant. What sorts of people do you see coming to the Alcove.

DB: Hmmm...as far as like economic...occupations – we're white, yeah mostly white collar. Mostly white collar, mostly professional people. Um...whereas I would say Mazza's is more of the blue collar...um...just an example this is republican headquarters for election time, so you have a more conservative...you know white collar, eh...where as Mazza's is the democratic headquarters...so were kind of conservative and stuff like that...

CM: And...do you get...are you guys involved in terms of the political...a lot?

DB: I don't...I'm the first one that's a democrat to own this, so...it's kinda...it's funny, which...and I don't discuss my politics much...it's known, but you know, it will continue to be republican headquarters just out of tradition, but yeah...I would say we'd attract almost a country club set.

CM: I mean you said out of tradition...you know that the republican headquarters has always been here...are there any other things that have traditionally been passed down since before you were here that...in terms of meetings...has Kiwanis always met here?

DB: Yeah...all the clubs. That's all...I think Rotary has been meeting here for over 50 years or something like that. And Kiwanis for quite some time. Yeah...most of the...it has been a hub for downtown. It's becoming less so as the town grows. But this is yeah...a very important part of Mt. Vernon.

CM: Um...in terms of cooking...sorry...this is a little bit abstract compared to some of the other stuff...in terms the actual cooking, and food...where do you recipes, and where does that stuff come from...has any of that been passed down...or...?

DB: Mmm hmm. Yeah...there's um probably about...not much of what we're selling now is passed down, but there's still a lot of...I mean we still kept them on file...they'll...they'll come back into vogue again – just you know...like can...like cut fruits are coming back, and that's what they used to serve...so we'll see if we return to them.

CM: Do you see...in the types of food, and in the types of recipes that you're currently serving...do you see almost social fads in terms of the...

DB: Yeah...somewhat...

CM: So they come and go...or is it just...

DB: Yeah.. Yeah...well I could say a lot about that, but it...um...what we serve is more traditional...um...we're slow to change. If it's happening somewhere...if...if it's happening in Columbus it's gonna be about four years before we're going to do it. It just takes some time to get here. but I've...I've noticed that...that's...that's real trendy. And food's stacked high, but now it's coming down.