

Cruisin' Times

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Magazine



A&W Family Restaurant, Boardman, Oh.

February 2012 ~ www.cruisintimes.org

- 🔧 Jim Harnichars' Long Haulin '57
- 🔧 Frank Renko's Kustom Vicky
- 🔧 A&W Boardman Tribute
- 🔧 Choppers Rod & Custom Show

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Farewell A&W Boardman

● Photos & Story: John Shapiro

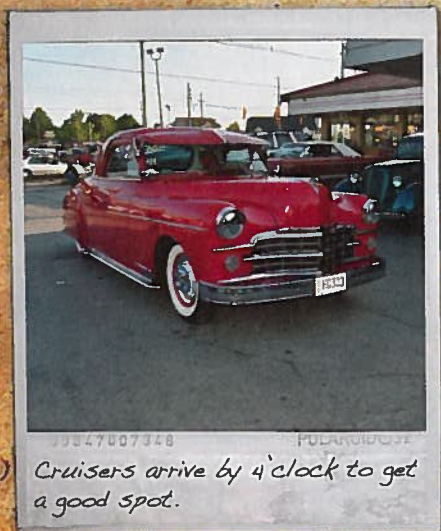
It was 1919, that the A & W Restaurants started in Lodi, California, when Frank Wright partnered with Roy Allen to help Wright with the root beer business he started and within a few years A&W became, arguably the first successful food-franchising operation. By 1960, A & W had over 2,000 stores and one of those was the A & W Drive-In Restaurant along Route 224 & in Boardman, Ohio.

Enter one Rick Thompson, who, as fate would have it, was driving down Route 224 and bumped into what would become his first boss. "We started talking and I wound up running the Boardman restaurant," Thompson said, "And a match was made in heaven."

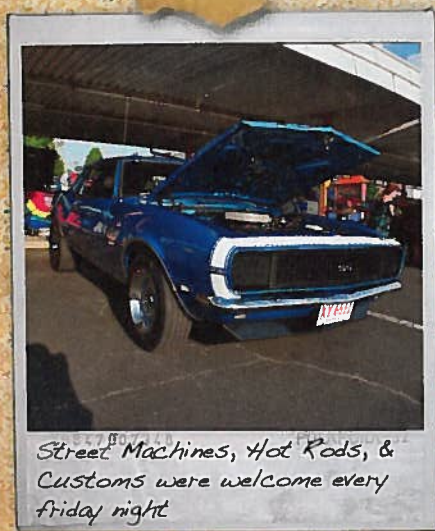
Within a year, Rick and his dad "Red" did more than run it, they bought the business. That was in 1974 and since then it's become one of the most well known spots around the



A view from the late 80's when the Hot Rod Nats were in their hey-day.



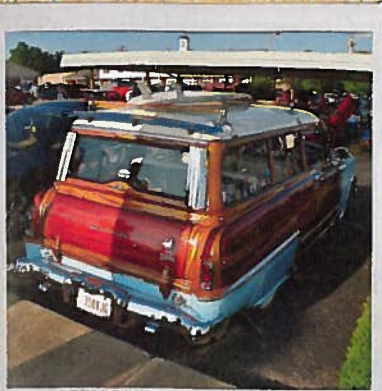
Cruisers arrive by 4'clock to get a good spot.



Street Machines, Hot Rods, & Customs were welcome every Friday night



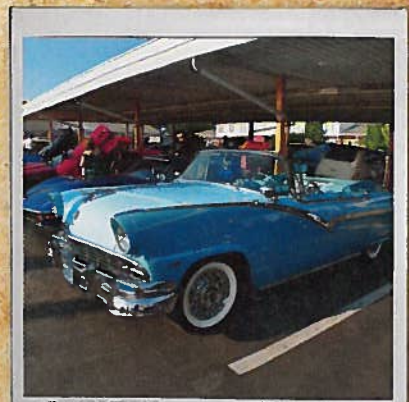
Big fenders, big grilles, big fun!



Surfs Up on Bill Dugens Latest Creation.



A pack of roadsters hanging out on a Friday night.



This Ford convertible got a prime parking spot under the canopy.



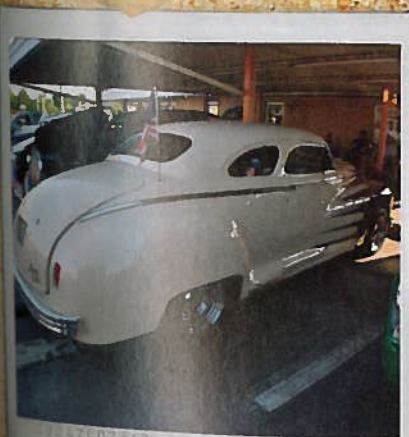
Junior and Senior cruisers relaxing in their T-Buckets.

Boardman/Youngstown area with a lot of loyal customers.

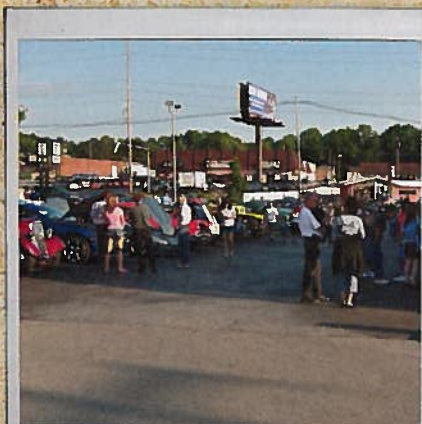
Later Thompson began to see the early signs of a nostalgia thing we call 'Cruise-ins'. Rick said, "A couple of places had already started hosting cruise-ins, one that I remember was the A&W in Ravenna who were the first East of the Mississippi and I thought let's give it a try".

It would be a couple of phone calls to Dick & Lori Nard, DJ's at "Two's Company" in 1986 along with the huge support of the Youngstown Rod & Custom Club, then known as the Youngstown Street Rod Association and the gears were set in motion. It was a cobb that remained until the store finally ended the 2011 Cruisin' season.

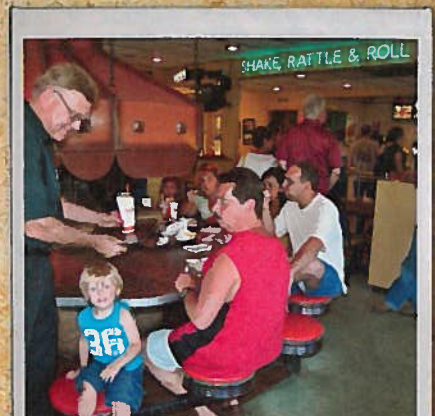
Over the years, Rick instituted theme nights each Friday night which ran the



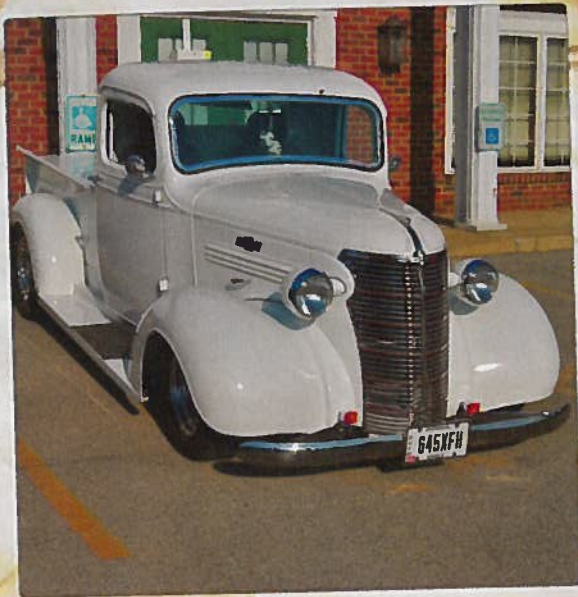
Chooch, long time Youngstown rod & custom club member.



Typical Friday night crowd throughout the years at the A&W.



Owner Rick Thompson (left) Serves up a cold one.



Cool cruisin in this Fat Fendered Chevy Pick up

gamut from: Aut Mori Grötto, Rod & Custom, Corvette, and Mustang nites to Mopar, Rock & Roll, Christmas in July and Elvis Nights. In fact Rick would always have at least five Elvis impersonators come in because of the huge demand! On Aut Mori Grotto night, Thompson would bring in the Grotto Clowns and in October he'd have a Halloween cruise and costume awards, for both adults, kids and car decoration.

During the hey-days of the Hot Rod Super Nationals, held at the nearby Canfield Fairgrounds, the A&W became the eppa-center of cruisin' activity. When the "Nats" would let out around 5pm, all the show cars would cruise down Rte 224 past the A&W which had crowds of on lookers lining the streets sometimes 3 deep just to be a part of the frenzy at the fa-

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mous corner of West Blvd and 224.

The A&W Boardman was also used as a Pre-kick off & welcome party for the LX Nationals & Beyond which used Quaker City Dragway as their home and only a short drive away.

"I've been with A & W for 53 years. I wouldn't be doing it all these years if I didn't love it, but it was time to retire," said Rick Thompson who sold the property to Advanced Auto and was closed the A&W one last time on New Year's Eve 2011.

Thompson said, "I don't know what to say, other than to thank everyone for all the support over the years and we certainly had a good run. I looked forward to each and every Friday night with all of you and thought all the cruisers were part of my extended family!"



Dick & Lori Nard, The Original DJs from 1986.

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