

DOING THE DOODLE
Herald Citizen Newspaper,
Sunday, 12 June 2005, Front Page & pg. 3.
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Photos by Camille Fliss

After nearly 60 years at its present location, Dipsy Doodle is moving down the road a little, and expanding its capacity a lot- up to 250.

There are still 12 days left to visit the old Dipsy Doodle restaurant before it moves into a new building and starts a new era.

A visit to the landmark little white shack on Hwy 70 is a trip back to the high cholesterol comfort food of the 1950's.

The atmosphere inside is often hazy from cigarette smoke and the chatter of customers talking to friends (and strangers) at different table or making jokes with the waitresses.

On the counter by the grill are homemade chocolate and coconut meringue pies with meringue caps at least 2" high. The pies are set next to a flat pan of homemade banana pudding.

Tables are close together and covered with silver cloths.

The meal of choice is the giant hamburger steak with fries, but other favorites include blue plate specials like the hot roast beef sandwich on white bread and covered in gravy.

Drop the name "Dipsy Doodle" into any conversation among long-term Cookevillians and Baxterites and sit back and listen to the memories come pouring out.

Debi Daniels, who bought the restaurant four years ago, says she's been told the following story by several couples.

"They told me that back when the Doodle was one of the few restaurants in town that on their wedding day they went to the courthouse to get married, then came to the Doodle for their wedding lunch or supper, then went up the road to the drive-in for entertainment and finally spent the night at the Southern Motel – which is now the Southern Apartments."

While Debi was born in White County and came back to Putnam County in high school, she didn't know much about the restaurant until her aunt, Ann Vison, bought the place in 2000.

"That's when I heard that it had the best hamburgers in town," she said.

Debi bought the restaurant from her aunt in 2001.

"I'd always wanted to have my own place," she said.

"My grandmother was a cook at the Old Triangle Café and cooked at the Hurricane Boat Dock Restaurant in Silver Point.

"Then she taught me how to do my own pies and pudding and that fit right in."

Daniels' secret to making a mile high meringue is to "beat it and beat it and beat it. Then dilute the sugar with a little water, add it to the egg whites and beat is some more.

“We have some people who eat here all the time, for all three meals,” she said. “But generally the construction crews tend to come in for breakfast, business people for lunch and families for dinner,” she said.

One long-term Dipsy Doodle claimed that one of the special attractions of the restaurant was that everybody felt at ease there.

“There’s no question of dressing up like at O’Charley’s or one of the restaurants on restaurant row. You can come straight to Dipsy Doodle from the farm or construction site,” she said.

Dipsy Doodle began life as a small, post World War II drive-in built by New York natives Fred and Helen Rizzo around 1947. Opinions vary on the exact date and no one knows where the name came from.

But everyone remembers that hamburgers then were 25 cents and a Coke cost a dime.

Over the years the restaurant has burned down and been rebuilt three times.

When Daniels bought the restaurant four years ago she added a little dining room.

“Now we can seat 82 customers,” she said.

The land is owned by the Sycamore Church of Christ which plans to build its new edifice on the Dipsy Doodle site in 2007.

“I had been thinking about adding on another room and redoing the interior,” Daniels said. “But I knew I didn’t want to do that unless I could stay in the building for another two years. When I talked to the people at the church and they said the plan was for the building to be torn down in 2007 it seemed logical to move.

“This is too good a business to quit. It’s been here almost 60 years and has a good reputation and customers who have been loyal for years,” she said.

When the building that used to be Giovanni’s Restaurant became available about two miles down the road at 2331 W. Broad (Hwy 70), Daniels decided to take the plunge.

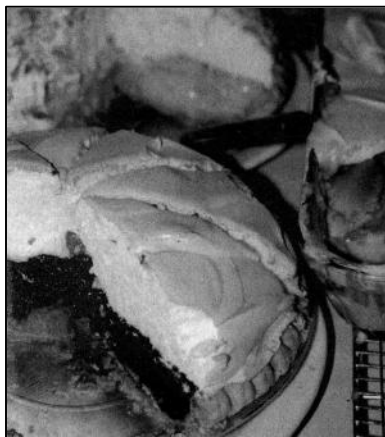
“I could have waited to move but the building was empty and if I go now I think people will realize that the Doodle isn’t closing, just relocating,” she said.

When the Doodle moves to its new location Daniels will have a restaurant nearly three times its present size with room for 250.

Dipsy Doodle will close at 9 p.m. on Saturday, June 25 and will reopen at its new location on Hwy. 70 on July 11. The restaurant is open from 5:30 a.m. until 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday and until 9 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.



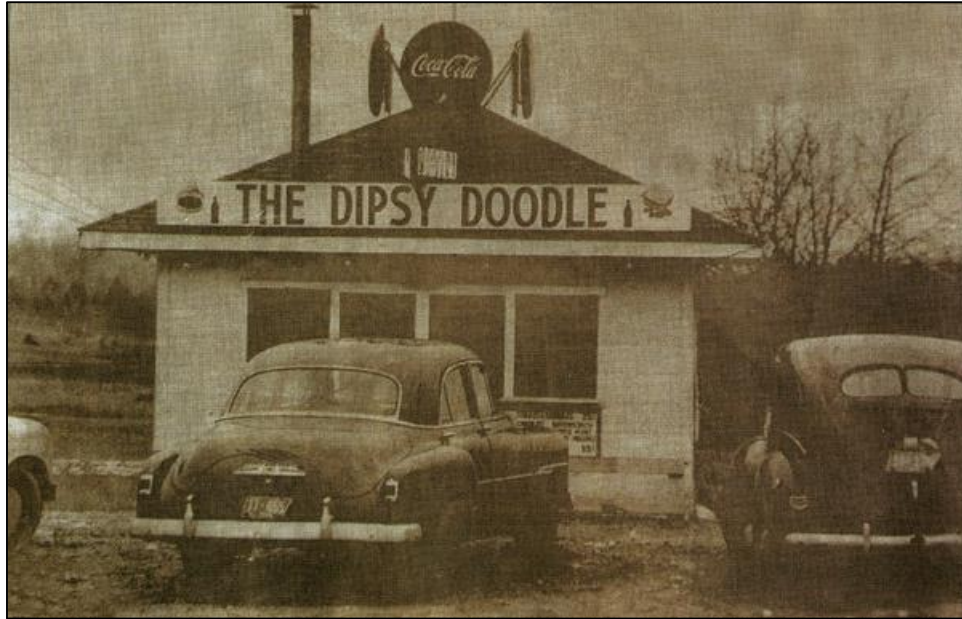
Sisters Joan Burgess and Debi Daniels get the food from the kitchen to the diners six days a week.



A couple of the famous home-made “Mile High Pies” offered at the Dipsy Doodle.



Debi Daniels, owner of the Dipsy Doodle, with some satisfied customers.



The first Dipsy Doodle was probably constructed around 1950.
H/C Photo/Camille Fliss.

The Dipsy Doodle Restaurant has been a popular dining spot since the early 1940's and is still in business today. It was first owned by Helen and Fred Rizzo, as a drive-in restaurant with a small counter and six stools inside. Marie Carr purchased the Dipsy Doodle in 1959 and continued to operate it as a drive-in until 1983 when the dining room was enlarged with several booths and tables to accommodate the large crowds. Courtesy Marie Carr. Picture and text from the book: *Siftings from Putnam County Tennessee* by Mary Hopson, pg. 18.

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