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20 Years
1984-2004

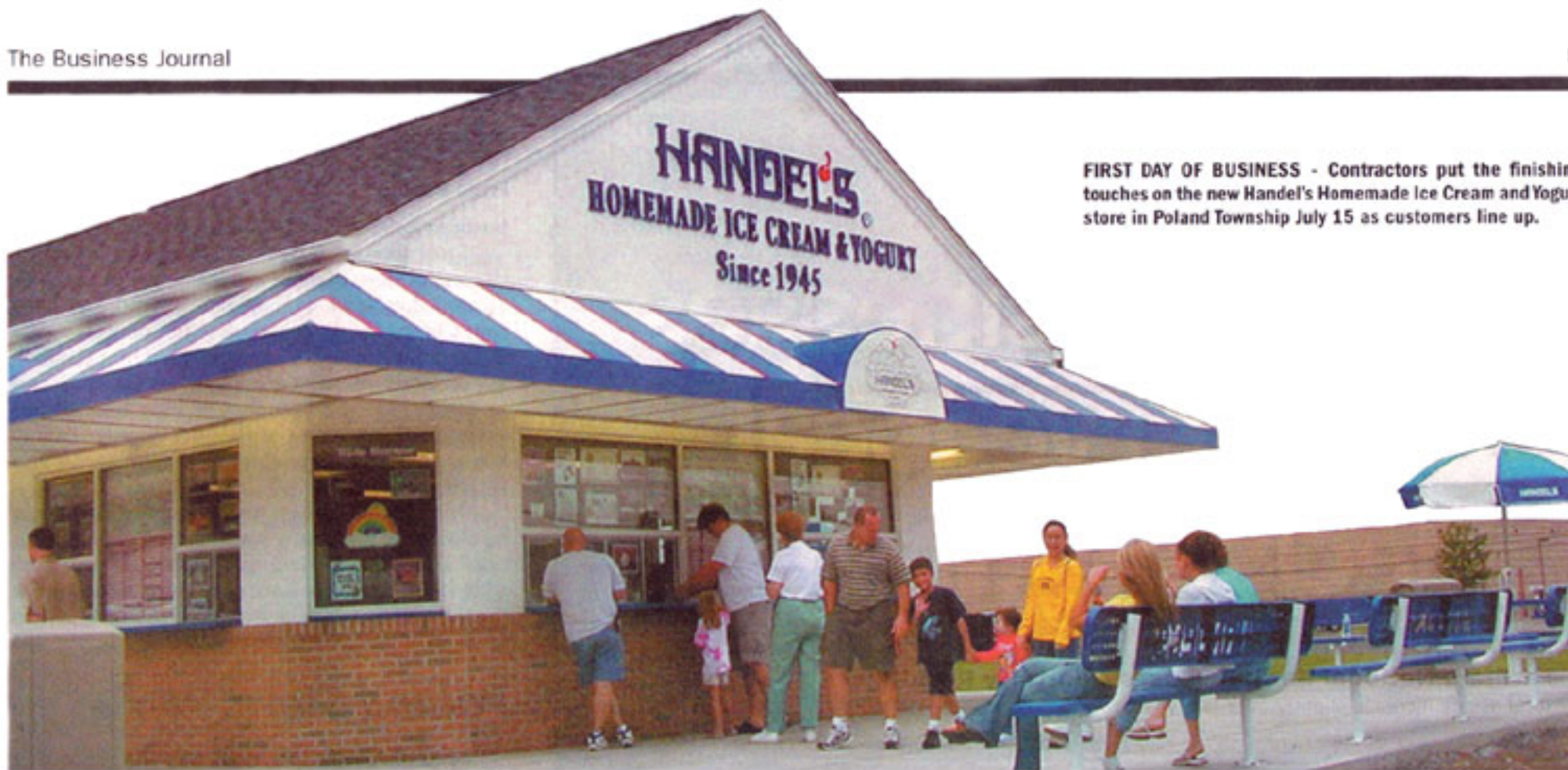
The Valley's Business Matters

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FIRST DAY OF BUSINESS - Contractors put the finishing touches on the new Handel's Homemade Ice Cream and Yogurt store in Poland Township July 15 as customers line up.

Handel's Expands

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business before opening his franchise in June 2003. "I just thought it was something that would be successful here because we really lack quality ice cream," says Boyd, who operates the store with his son, Chris. "I really just took a flier on it."

Boyd says customers generally tell him Handel's is "certainly the best ice cream in Toledo," and in most cases the best they've ever had. Butter pecan is his top seller, with other popular flavors being mint chocolate chip, chocolate pecan and vanilla.

Although in business just over a year, Boyd says he already is "diligently looking for a second location" and is in negotiations over three or four possible sites. "I hope to have something settled on in the next 30 days," he says, adding that he'd like to be open by next February or March. **B**

Poland Store: From Page 5

"I love the people that I work with and that's what makes my job great," she said. "A lot of the customers are happy people," she added. "They're getting ice cream - they're in a good mood."

On a busy summer night, even with eight serving windows, Fisher said lines will be six to 10 people deep. At the original Handel's in Youngstown, which had only four windows, store employees once served 1,700 customers in three hours, he related.

Confirming the tastes of the thousands who regularly patronize the homegrown ice cream chain, Handel's has acquired a collection of celebrity customers over the years. Its best-known ambassador is Bill Cosby, who Fisher said calls "all the time" and recently had some ice cream sent to fellow comedian Ellen DeGeneres.

Fisher once sent butter pecan to Tom Cruise, who was at Nelson Ledges racing with Paul Newman, and an hour later the actor came by to thank him.

On the day the Poland store opened, Fisher learned that golfers in town for the Giant Eagle LPGA Classic refer to the tournament as "the Handel's stop."

Other celebrity patrons include singers Pat Benatar and Shania Twain, who had Handel's for her birthday two years ago, actor and Youngstown native Ed O'Neill, and singers Maureen McGovern of Boardman, Ben Vereen and the late Mel Torme.

"But we wouldn't be where we are today without the people of Youngstown, Mahoning County and Trumbull County," Fisher pointed out. "We've been around since 1945 and they're great supporters."

The grand opening for the Poland Handel's is planned for Aug. 8. While a number of specials will be offered that weekend, Fisher said this weekend the company is giving away cones to the first 250 customers each day.

He is optimistic about the Poland location, observing there are about 35,000 people who live in the three-mile ring around the store and 56,000 people in the five-mile ring.

Yesterday Joanne Colombo came from much farther away to indulge in her favorite Handel's flavor, grape. The Austintown native, who lives in Hudson, said she tries to visit each Handel's store she can, although she passed one in Massillon a week ago.

"I've been to nine of them at least," she said. "It's the best ice cream anywhere." **B**

'Youngstowners Came Out of the Woodwork'

When Handel's opens stores in Indiana and Pennsylvania, fans suddenly materialize.

By George Nelson

Len Fisher could hardly have chosen a more appropriate time to open his newest Handel's Homemade Ice Cream and Yogurt store in Poland. Not only was July the 20th anniversary of National Ice Cream Month - first proclaimed by President Ronald Reagan in 1984 - but this year marks the 100th anniversary of the creation of the ice cream cone.

It's also nearly two decades since Fisher took over Handel's from its founder, Alice Handel. She began making ice cream in 1945 at her husband's gas station on the south side of Youngstown, and her recipes continue to draw patrons from throughout - and beyond - the Mahoning Valley.

Handel was in her 70s when Fisher approached her about selling her products in grocery stores, but instead she sold him the entire business in 1985. She continued to work at the original store, located on what in 1985 was named Handel's Court and is still operating today, until her death in 1987, the year Fisher opened the second Handel's location, in Liberty Township.

Since then, Handel's has expanded to locations throughout Ohio as well as in Pennsylvania and Indiana. Fisher, who noted that all the ice cream is made on site at the individual stores, said five more stores are planned to open this summer, bringing the total to 32, with another 63 under contract. The company, which is headquartered in Canfield, operates five stores that collectively employ 91.

Greg Glaros, who owns the Handel's franchise store in Fishers, Ind., says the product was successful there "right out of the gate." A native of Boardman, Glaros was working as a vice president

for RCA in Indianapolis when he decided to leave the company and get into the ice cream business. After training for three weeks in Youngstown - learning to run a store and to make ice cream - he opened his stand in June 2002. In September, he will open his second Handel's store, in Carmel, Ind. "The Youngstowners came out of the woodwork," he recalls. "Then the Hoosiers here, they just loved the product immediately."

Chocolate pecan is well-received, but not as much as in Youngstown. The top sellers include cookie dough, mint chocolate chip, butter pecan, chocoholic chunk and peanut butter parfait. "The

ingredients on their own are spectacular - our pecans are second to none," he remarks.

Loyalty to Handel's has grown in the two years Glaros has operated his store. He says families moving from the area will often stop for one final treat before leaving town. "These are new customers." These are people from Indiana who never heard of [Handel's] before we opened," he says.

Former Youngstowner Dick Boyd reports he also has met with success bringing Handel's to Toledo. A native of the West Side, Boyd has been in Toledo the past 25 years and was in the plastics machinery

See HANDEL'S EXPANDS, page 6

Handel's Ice Cream Opens Poland Township Store

POLAND, July 16 - It's hardly a scoop to report that Handel's ice cream is really, really popular.

Contractors were putting the finishing touches on the new Handel's Homemade Ice Cream and Yogurt store on Clingan Road as customers drove in - or just walked down the road - for a cone, sundae or whatever treat would satisfy their sweet spot Thursday afternoon.

"We live about five houses down so we watched them build it," said Larry Matzys, who was there with his wife, Lynne, and their children, Nina and Tad. "We're definitely excited about it because my wife loves ice cream as well as the kids, of course," he said.

Leonard Fisher, owner of the Handel's chain, said he convinced his blacktop contractor to complete the parking lot for this weekend, just one remaining step in getting the store ready. His store manager hired the 25 employees who trained at the company's store on South Avenue in Boardman.

"So it wasn't as difficult as some franchises where they have to wait until they're ready [with the building], then they have to train for four days and they open three days later," he said. "Here I had the girls

come in two days ago and start making up all the ice cream."

Each of the chain's 27 stores - five, including the new Poland location, are company-owned - are designed the same, so employees can be brought in from other stores as needed.

The dipping cabinets are labeled to help workers keep track of the 48 flavors offered every day. Employees receive about 10 hours of training, and initially half the crew on each shift will be employees from existing stores "to make it an easy transition," Fisher said.

Employees get acclimated to their jobs in about a week or two. "That's why we wait two weeks or so before we have our actual grand opening," he explained.

Faith Ferguson of Canfield, assistant manager at Poland, said it takes about one month to learn to do everything. Ferguson, a biology major at Youngstown State University, was hired about five years ago at the Canfield store then worked at several locations before transferring to Poland. She said she wouldn't still be with the company if she didn't love her job.

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**Ceremonial
grand
opening of
new store
is set for
Aug. 8.**