

# arts and entertainment

## Fair food frequently far from palate pleasing delight

By Ben T. Shomshor

The fare at the fair often is less than fair. Though many of us long have expected this to be the case, I ventured forth last Tuesday with anticipatory indigestion and a very hesitant spouse—all in the greater interest of students who will go forth this weekend to ply the young ladies on their arms with such delicacies as corn dogs and cotton candy.

### food review

Since it presumably is impossible for anyone to try all of the concessions available at this year's Nebraska State Fair, I was preceded by starving hordes of pre-pubescent gourmands in the guise of the Baker Street Irregulars; the cause of their irregularity is now known.

Armed with their recommendations about the "good" places to eat, and wisely avoiding the same, this writer began what was surely to be a trek through the Valley of Death.

#### Wide variety

Surprisingly, things are not so bad as expected. A wide variety of food, much of it competently prepared, is offered to the fair-goer. Those without a sense of adventure can find the familiar menus of Kentucky Fried Chicken and Taco John's. Hungry exhibitors enjoy wholesome dinners at Dumpling's and the Fair Cafe, and public-spirited folks desiring a decent burger will find plenty of concession booths operated by churches and various service organizations.

All of the concessionaries I talked with were proud of the quality of food and service they provided. In the case of a Midwest Concessions Corn Dog Stand that didn't mean they actually would eat the product they sold, but they assured me that they simply did not care for hot dogs that much. Since that was my first, and hopefully last, experience with a corndog, I fully agreed. This traditional fair item is edible, but the thick and slightly greasy batter suffocating a bland hot dog is not one of America's great contributions to the culinary world.

#### Volunteer operations

The Harris-Fraley Post 131 of the VFW was characteristic of the small organizational operations with workers volunteering their time and talents. Invariably, I find myself more impressed with such stands than I do with the commercial operations. Apparently many other folks do also, for John Colborn, the manager of the VFW stand said the customers return year after year. Open since 1946, this stand, and others like it, have built a statewide reputation. Try the cheeseburger for 85 cents.

Beer is on sale at the fair this year for the first time. Budweiser and Falstaff are poured at two locations, the Fair Cafe and the Grandstand for \$1.00 per 16 oz. glass. For many this seems to be a refreshing way to rest one's feet, even if they choose to stand through three or four beers.

There is another aspect of food at the fair which all should avail themselves of the opportunity to see. As an agricultural state, Nebraska is important in the production of food. While we tend to think of food as the finished product, the state fair offers one the chance to see and learn about food at a much earlier stage in the production process.



## Minister, family become closer running pizza business

By Peg Sheldrick

Everyone talks about the decaying family unit, but no one ever does anything about it.

No one, that is, except Kal Knudson. "I feel that I neglected my family for eighteen years," Knudson said. So I decided to take a leave of absence from my profession."

Knudson was a minister in the United Church of Christ.

"I feel that the family unit is important in the stability of our country," says Knudson. To prove it, he undertook a totally new lifestyle. Knudson and his family now own and run Pontillo's Pizzeria (1246 Q St.).

The big change came after years of serving the church. He had gone through college and the seminary (where he earned his Master of Divinity) and was securely settled in his position as minister in Center-ville, S.D. But the fall of 1977 found Knudson and son Kent in Tucson, Ariz. for two and a half months of restaurant training.

#### Childhood dream

"Ever since I was a child, I thought it would be nice to own a restaurant," Knudson said. "I'm sort of fulfilling a

childhood dream, and unbeknownst to me, my oldest son was also thinking about the restaurant business. So I didn't have to talk him into anything"

After a brief start in Pocatello, Idaho, the family found its way to Lincoln, where Knudson signed on as manager for a local eatery. Through his brother, the family became acquainted with a pizza place in Minneapolis owned by the Pontillos.

Impressed with the restaurant's product and motif, the Knudsons arranged to open another pizzeria like it in Lincoln. It appealed to them for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that it was family-owned and family-operated. It had "family feelings we liked," Knudson said.

#### Family builders

The family orientation influenced not only the business arrangements but the carpentry on the building the pizzeria would occupy. Knudson and his sons, did the wood work themselves with no experience. His wife and daughters also helped with the interior. Converting the cinderblock of the former Hong Kong Pizza King to the current wood-encased exterior and interior was "eye-opening," Knudson said he takes great pride in his family's accomplishment.

The restaurant has been open four months. Has the effort to pull the family closer worked?

"Definitely," says Kal. "Hey, it's gotta be closer when you're working together almost 24 hours a day."

#### Work together

The entire family has helped to make a go of the new way of life. Knudson's wife Darlene, with degrees in elementary and secondary education, also took a leave of absence from her profession. The two oldest sons, Kent and Kevin, are partners with their parents in the ownership of the restaurant and have moved into the family home.

Knudson said he thinks the result is a closer relationship, both physically and emotionally, for the family.

"It's amazing," says Darlene. "We haven't had one argument . . . We do things together."

Each member of the family (including high school student Darla and 14-year-old Kelly has a job in the pizzeria. "It's been such a beautiful thing to me to watch them each develop their own expertise," Knudson said. His own forte is public relations

"I open the door for people and carry out pizzas," he said.

"He likes to sit and talk with the customers anyway," explains Darlene.

According to Darlene, her husband is the supervisor, the one everyone asks when questions come up.

"That's because I have this whole backlog of restaurant experience . . . I ate at them so much when I was going to school," Knudson said.

He still is working part-time in the ministry, and he expects to return to the church full-time. But he will continue at Pontillo's "on the periphery." The family will still run the restaurant, and expansion appears possible.

"It's interesting to me the number of students who have remarked to me how important they feel the family operation is," Knudson said.

#### Humor best friend

And it's interesting to observe the number of customers who enjoy chatting with Kal. "I think humor is man's best friend, and not his dog," he explains. "I try to bring a little joy and happiness into the lives of the people I meet, and I've received a lot of satisfaction in the restaurant business just doing that. There've been a lot of customers who thought I was crazy. But that don't matter."