Let’s Go To Pete’s

Pete’s Candyland is a name that brings many long-forgotten, but none the less special, memories back to former customers. Pete’s Candyland, located at 108 North Franklin, was owned by Pete Kachulis. It was the favorite soda shop of Kirksville residents from 1931-1963.

The earliest experiences Mr. Kachulis had with the candy business were first as an employee of a candy shop in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and later at a shop in Brooklyn, New York. He then moved to Brookfield, Missouri, and worked in a shop for a couple of years before coming to Kirksville.

In 1931 Mr. Kachulis went into business in Kirksville, Missouri, with Tom Puppas. Their candy shop, named the Olympia, was located at 112 North Franklin, just two doors north of where Pete’s Candyland would be located. In 1930 the partnership dissolved and Mr. Kachulis decided to open his own shop in order to make a living and to practice what he loved doing.

What became known at Pete’s Candyland was opened in early 1931. Pete’s Candyland became the citizens’ favorite place to “hang out.” The most memorable thing about Pete’s Candyland was the homemade candy. Right above the candy shop Mr. Kachulis had a walk-in cooler and huge copper mixing kettles in which the candy was prepared. Up against the wall, next to the mixing kettles were the large wooden spoons used for stirring and mixing the candy. A large marble table used for cutting the candy sat in the middle of the room. The candy was made only at night because Mr. Kachulis didn’t want to leave the shop during the day. Bill, Mr. Kachulis’ oldest child, remembers many nights when he, his family, and the employees would work into the early hours of the morning making candy. Candy was not made every night but there were always the finishing touches to do. Much of the candy (such as the chocolate-covered cherries and candy that contained nuts) took more than one day to make. For example one night the cherries would be prepared and the next night they would be dipped in chocolate. Also, the nuts would be dipped in chocolate two or three nights in a row until the right thickness was achieved. Steve Hunt, a former customer, stated that the thing he remembers most about the candy was, “Each one of his pieces of chocolate candy you could look at it and tell by swirl on top what was inside of it. While the chocolate was still wet, Mr. Kachulis took his finger and swirled each one a certain way, one meant strawberry, one meant lemon, and one meant caramel or peanut and if you knew his code you could tell what it was.” Besides all the chocolate covered candies, Pete’s Candyland sold English toffee, peanut and coconut brittles, candy canes, and divinity.

All the candy could be bought in gift boxes. These were especially popular around Christmas, Valentine’s Day and other holidays. The everyday candy box was very plain with just the logo “Pete’s Candyland” on the lid, but the boxes for the holidays were very fancy. Cleta Rose, a former employee, remembers receiving the most gorgeously decorated boxes from the Kachulises. The candy was sold...
for $1.25 per pound and was well worth it. Mr. Kachulis stressed quality and achieved his goal of making the finest candies. Bill Kachulis stated, "the secret to good quality chocolate was the amount of chocolate on the product."

The candy was not the only handmade item. During the early years all the ice cream was handmade. Former employees, Les and Cleta Rose remember Heavenly Hash and the Helen Special as being the two most popular treats with the customers. "The Helen Special was started by a girl who liked to eat her ice cream fixed that way but I can't remember her last name," recalled Mrs. Rose. Jacquelin Harrison, a former customer, remembers never being able to walk by Pete's without going in and getting a Helen Special. Heavenly Hash was made with two scoops of vanilla ice cream and strawberries with marshmallow and ground peanuts on the strawberries. The Helen Special sold for 35 cents and was made of chocolate ice cream, chocolate syrup, and peanuts. Another popular ice cream was the Tin Roof. Bill Kachulis stated, "People were mad over it." It was made with chocolate ice cream, chocolate syrup, and real marshmallow with peanuts on top. One of Mr. Kachulis' own inventions was the process of making soft chocolate ice cream. This process was called Sana Freeze. This process was a secret of Mr. Kachulis and was unknown to those outside of the family. The ice cream became very popular with the customers. Another popular item still in demand today, was the banana split which sold for 25 cents. Some choices of topping were pineapple, strawberries, cherries, nuts, and chocolate. All the fruit toppings were preserved made by his wife, Mary. In the later years Mr. Kachulis quit making his own ice cream and bought it from the Palace Bakery which was also located in Kirksville.

Pete's Candyland was also the first shop to have popcorn. In late 1951 or early 1952 Pete's came out with fresh buttered popcorn which was sold in boxes. It was a first for Kirksville and therefore, was a big hit.

The soda fountain was located along the south side of the wall. It received a lot of use by the teens who would come in after school and sit and sip on a cherry coke or a lemon phosphate. Green River, which was equivalent to the present day lemon-lime drink, was also a favorite of the teens. Limeade was popular with everyone. It was freshly squeezed every day and sweetened with glucose instead of granulated sugar. Vanilla and chocolate cokes were also sold.

There were always two or three malt machines working. Zada (Stanley) Lindquist, a former employee, stated, "They were thick and creamy and you could get any flavor you wanted."

In the back of the store, booths lined the walls. The teens would dance to popular songs coming from the nickelodeon. Les Rose remembers the tunes of Guy Lombardo. He commented that Lombardo's music was, "the most beautiful music this side of Heaven and his saxophones had the sweetest sounds." During the 1950s Ms. Lindquist remembers the teen listening to the Ames Brothers' "You You You" and the tunes of Eddy Fisher. Elvis Presley tunes were also very popular during the 1950s and early 1960s.

As well as the sweets, Pete's Candyland had a luncheonette with homemade sandwiches and soup. Pete's tunafish sandwiches were the favorite of the business customers that came in. They were said to be fantastic on plain white bread and even better when they were grilled. Some other sandwiches that were sold were the ham salad sandwich and the grilled Spam sandwich. Mary Jane Valuck, a former customer, remembers going to Pete's Candyland during her lunch break, "I would order a grilled Spam sandwich, chips, and a Coke. The sandwiches were so yummy and crispy and good. Pete used mayonnaise containing black pepper which made it so good."

"Working for the Kachulis was a pleasure," said Mr. and Mrs. Rose. "They took us under their wing and treated us just like family." Ms. Lindquist commented that they really cared about their employees, "Every night after work they would take us home, and that is something today's employers wouldn't even be concerned with." As well as hiring help, the whole Kachulis family worked in the shop with each doing their own specific job as well as helping with the making of the candy. Another thing that employees remember about working for Mr. Kachulis was how clean he required it. If an employee wasn't waiting on someone there were always tables to be wiped or glasses to be shined. The place was cleaned each and every night before going home, not the next morning.

There was always a time of day Mr. Kachulis and his employees knew would be the busiest. Students poured in after the schools let out at three o'clock. Anna Bell Miller,
a former employee of Pete’s Candyland in the late 1950s, remembers lining cokes up from one end of the counter to the other in anticipation of the crowd. Jeanne Truits Coy stated, “I went down to Pete’s everyday after school for a coke and a Snickers.” Also during the school lunch break many teens would go to Pete’s to eat. Another busy time was after the movie or a dance had ended. People often stayed until one or two in the morning. Parents knew that Mr. Kachulis ran a tight ship and their children, no matter what time of day, had to behave while they were there. Parents also knew that drinking and foul language were not permitted so they didn’t worry about their children being harmed or influenced in the wrong way.

Teenagers were always found at Pete’s Candyland, but they were not the only ones that looked forward to going there. Younger children that went with their parents found it an almost bigger treat. Lilaf Thompson, a former customer, recalled, “I felt very ‘big’ going where all the teenagers hung out.”

Another group of people that could be found at Pete’s during the 1950s were the young men from Sublette. They would go there to meet girls and relax before they had to go back to the Air Force base for duty. They felt very much at home at Pete’s and Mr. Kachulis would often talk to them and help them with any problems they might have.

In 1963 Mr. Kachulis felt retirement was best for him. His art for making candy was becoming very unprofitable and it was becoming very hard for him to make a living. Making candy without the use of machines was becoming virtually impossible, it was a “dying art.” At about the same time Mr. Kachulis received an offer to rent the building to Moore O’Day, a local dress shop. This would give he and his wife a fixed income for their retirement. He accepted the offer and so in the fall of 1963 Pete’s Candyland closed. There was no fuss or ceremony. Mr. Kachulis just locked the door.

The townspeople were very unhappy. Ron Miller, a regular customer, summed up his feelings saying that he “would miss the place where he met his buddies and took his girl.” To Ms. Lindquist the mere sight of the empty building, even today, gives her an empty feeling inside and reminds her of all the good times that she had.

Today, the ceiling is lowered, the soda fountain and booths are gone. Even the original stairs to the candy-making room have been taken out. The dance floor, once crowded, has aged with the years and upstairs still stands the marble table used for cutting candy. On the door to the old candy-making room is a sign that reads “Pete’s Come In.” That small building holds many memories even to us almost 20 years later. It is plain to see the joy Mr. Kachulis, his family, and Pete’s Candyland gave to the residents of this area.