

Mr. Arthur Vambaketes, Member of the Vambaketes Family Ownership Group of Tony's Ranch House Restaurant and Lounge at 3330 Godfrey Road in Godfrey, Illinois; Lifelong Resident of the Godfrey-Alton region of Madison County Illinois; Veteran Social Studies Middle School Teacher of the Jennings and Ferguson-Florissant School Districts in St. Louis County, Missouri

Transcript of a Follow-Up Interview for the Madison Historical Society Oral History Project.

Interviewed by Mr. Brian K. Weaver, Sr., PhD History Student at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Date: June 10, 2024

Brian Weaver [BW]: [Recording Starts]: 00:08 This is an informal follow-up interview with Mr. Arthur Vambaketes concerning the Greek American heritage of the Alton-Godfrey, Illinois region. The initial interview took place at Tony's Ranch House Restaurant and Lounge on May 28, 2024. This and the previous interview were conducted on behalf of the Madison County Oral History Project that is part of Madison Historical, the Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois. The follow-up interview took place on Monday, June 10, 2024, at Tony's Ranch House Restaurant and Lounge in Godfrey, Illinois, 3330 Godfrey Road. I'd like to start this interview by exchanging pleasantries with my friend Mr. Arthur Vambaketes, affectionately known as AJ. How are you doing today sir?

Arthur Vambaketes [AV]: 01:05 I'm doing well. Good to see you again Mr. Weaver.

BW: 01:07 Ah, it's always a pleasure to be able to come and visit with you, and to especially exchange information concerning historical topics, in this case concerning Madison County, Northwestern Madison County, and the Godfrey and the Alton region. As we spoke last time, we spoke on several topics: Ethno- demographics, community change, just to name a few. I want to follow up with a couple of questions, if you'd be so kind, sir.

AV: 01:45 Sure.

BW: 01:46 Okay, I'd like to start off by asking you to review. Mr. Vambaketes, please review the immigration experience of your family, beginning with your great grandfather, George? Is that correct?

AV: 02:03 Yeah. So, George would have been my grandfather's dad. He came over in the early 20th century. Just, I think was just him, maybe with his oldest son. They came over together to try to get the road paved and get things settled before the rest of the family came over. And then, I think 12 years later, his wife who was still back in Greece, came over, and then they ended up starting a family over here.

BW: 02:40 Uhm hm.

AV: 02:41 And my grandfather was born over here.

BW: 02:44 Okay, so then your maternal great-grandmother, do you recall her name?

AV: 02:50 Her name was Stella.

BW: 02:51 Oh, Stella. Okay, so that would be Stella Vambaketes.

AV: 02:55 Yep. It was Stella Maggos, and then she married George Vambaketes.

BW: 03:00 Alright. And so, I recall you saying that your great-grandfather was an entrepreneur, if you will, in the service industry, concerning bars and such in the industrial district of Alton?

AV: 03:22 Yeah, on Broadway in Alton, they had the glassworks, they had the steel mill, Olin was on Broadway right there, and right on Broadway, there was a place called Big George's, that would have been his place.

BW: 03:36 Big Georges.

AV: 03:37 Big Georges.

BW: 03:38 Okay. And so that kind of set the stage for future business avenues for your family going forward, being...

AV: 03:54 Well, yeah, I don't know about all the other brothers, but my grandfather, he followed in his dad's footsteps, and he ended up starting some bars also on Broadway in the industrial area. Once, you know, he got older and started on his own footing.

BW: 04:15 Okay, and so then with your great-grandpa, with Big George's, are we safe to say in the 30s and 40s, maybe?

AV: 04:27 Yep.

BW: 04:27 Okay. 1930s-1940s. And so, then your grandfather...

AV: 04:34 And maybe slightly before that too.

BW: 04:36 Oh, the 20s.

AV: 04:38 Because my grandfather was born in 1920. So, I mean, I would think if he didn't have it, then he probably had it within 10 years, you know, within ten years of that.

BW: 04:51 And your grandfather was born here?

AV: 04:52 And my grandfather was born here, yep.

BW: 04:54 Okay, so your great grandfather, like you say, paved the way. And so then with your grandfather, John, correct?

AV: 05:05 Correct.

BW: 05:06 Okay. And, uh, he was an entrepreneur in his own right, correct?

AV: 05:13 Uhm hm.

BW: 05:13 Okay, could you talk a little bit, refresh about...?

AV: 05:16 Well, following in his dad's footsteps, I guess he started a bar with his, it would have been his uncle, Tony Maggos. And it was called the Sandbar. And it was also located on Broadway, a little bit further east. And I shared that one article, when my grandfather got in trouble, I guess for having a gaming room at the Sandbar. That's, that's that place.

BW: 05:44 Okay,

AV: 05:45 If you want to be able to connect the dots there. And then I don't know if it had something to do with that article or what, but within a year after that, his partner, which I think everything was in the partner's name, pretty much decided that he was going to give the Sandbar to his kid and kind of left my grandpa kind of on the outs. So, he went and bought another place on Broadway, and he called it Johnny's.

BW: 06:08 Ah hah.

AV: 06:09 And it was located right next to the AHEPA Hall, which was the local Greek American organization. And there's, um, and he was able to get that place because it was his, I want to say maybe his uncle's. And it's still there. It's a diner called G-B Grill. It's been open since the 40s. And it was located right next to that. And GB was Gus Boukas, which I think his aunt married Gus Boukas, so that was the connection there.

BW: 06:34 Uhm hmm. Uh huh. And so then, through all this, he met his wife, your grandmother, Mary.

AV: 06:54 Yep.

BW: 06:55 And so Mary came from Greece?

AV: 06:57 Yeah, she came in 1947. Her dad had actually fought with the United States in World War Two. So, he was already over here. And she and her mom and her older brother came over, it was just the three of them, and met up with their dad. And then they ended up you know, raising a family, and they were farmers in the Fosterburg area, still in Madison County.

BW: 07:24 Okay. Alright. Well, that's going to be very important and helpful information, like you say, for me to connect the dots, and be able to compose—write a nice, cogent history of the Tony's Ranch House—especially as it relates to the immigration phase and origins, if you will. Okay, Mr. Vambaketes, I Thank you so much. Can we talk a little bit about...I want to focus on your grandmother.

AV: 07:57 Okay.

BW: 07:57 And you pronounce the special word Yai-Yai?

AV: 08:01 Yeah, Yai-Yai, that's just grandma in Greek..

BW: 08:05 Okay, and could you talk about her role in the restaurant?

AV: 08:11

Well, she was pretty much—with the first places—they were more drinking establishments, so she didn't have much to do with those. Whenever this place got bought in 1960, my dad would have been nine years old, so she pretty much was still staying at home. But once he got a little older, then she would come out here, and she would do, like the steam table, and she would make the specials, and she would help the cooks. She never really had a set schedule. She would just come out here and help them out.

BW: 08:43 And was it called Carroll's at that time?

AV: 08:45 Yes, during that time, it would have been called Carroll's.

BW: 08:49 And so we're talking about the 1960s and the 70s?

AV: 08:52 Probably, like more closer to the 1970s. And then she did it all the way through, up until probably 2000. You know, I mean, I remember her coming out here. I don't know about when I was teaching in 2007.

BW: 09:08 Right.

AV: 09:08 But pretty close, and then she was still coming out here. I mean, it would be more sparingly, but she would come out here and she would do the soups, and she would do the pasta sauces and that kind of stuff.

BW: 09:19 Uhm hm. So, she did have an active, important role in the restaurant. Even if it's not so much as being well, it sounds like more behind the scenes.

AV: 09:32 It was definitely behind the scenes and more of the cooking area. She loved to cook. She was the oldest of five or six girls, and they were really close with the church. So, I mean, she cooked. It seemed like a full-time job in her house.

BW: 09:48 Uhm hm.

AV: 09:48 But she'd also come out here just because she was really good at that kind of stuff.

BW: 09:52 Right. And so then by you being born in 1980, as a child, would you say that in the 80s, she was more sparingly here, she wasn't here as much?

AV: 10:07 Probably not as much, not as much.

BW: 10:08 So you really didn't get a chance to be under her on a day-by-day basis here at the restaurant?

AV: 10:12 No, Um, well, in the 80s and 90s,

BW: 10:15 I mean mainly in the cooking phase...

AV: 10:17 She would still come out here and she might work two hours in the morning. Like I said, she might come and make the red marinara sauce. And you know, when she'd come out here, the girls would help her with the onions; they would all be cleaned. And she would just, they would even be diced. See, we just had to put everything together. But yeah, probably like I said, she would still be coming out here. Up until probably the year 2000 I would think. Actually, actively helping.

BW: 10:46 Okay, okay. And so then would you say that her role with the customers— was there a distinct kind of role with her and the customers?

AV: 10:57 No, she was more behind the scenes, there was more of a connection with the cooks.

BW: 11:01 Ah.

AV: 11:02 You know, she would show them tricks that she learned throughout her time, I guess.

BW: 11:11 Okay. So, then we're going to continue to weave this story together. Let's review the sequence of Tony's Ranch House ownership.

AV: 11:23 Okay.

BW: 11:23 Dating back to the 1940s. So, in the 1940s, it was, is this actual building here, is portions of it from the 1940s?

AV: 11:35 Yeah, this frontage part, you know, the part that looks like an old brick ranch building, that's always been here, the stuff kind of in the back is how they kind of added on and made it a little bit larger.

BW: 11:46 Okay. And so then in the 40s,

AV: 11:50 It was owned by somebody named Phil. I think one of those links that I sent you has his name, that newspaper.com link.

BW: 11:57 Right. I'm going to ask you to resend them.

AV: 11:59 Okay.

BW: 11:59 Because I clicked on them too many times before realizing I hadn't worked out how I was really going to use them. So now my...

AV: 12:07 Well, maybe I have to do screenshots because whenever I tried to do something else, like do a search, they wanted me to join, and they wanted me to at first; it was free for seven days. So, I might have to do some screenshots, but I'll try to get that to you. I have the links. That's all I have.

BW: 12:17 Okay, so in other words you still have the... Right. I've got the links too. But it won't let me in.

AV: 12:24 When you click on it, it won't let you open it. I'll try to figure something out.

BW: 12:28 Okay.

AV: 12:29 But the first owner, his name was Phil. and he owned it in the 1940s. And it was more of a, you know, like an A&W Root Beer, you know, kind of like a, what do you call those drive...?

BW: 12:41 A drive-in?

AV: 12:44 Yeah, it was more of a drive in, not a drive through, a drive in.

BW: 12:47 Right. Right. Right. As a matter of fact, Steak and Shake used to be just like that.

AV: 12:50 Okay, I didn't know that.

BW: 12:51 Oh, yes, Steak and Shake was, and now Sonic is the new version.

AV: 12:55 Sonic still kind of does it, yeah. So, that was in the 40s, and I'm not sure if George Carroll and, I'm pretty sure George Carroll, my dad, and my grandfather, came in at the same time in 1960. So, that guy would have owned it from the 1940s. I don't know if it was the beginning of the 1940s or towards the latter part. So, then they owned it—those two, from 1960, and it would be called Carroll's. So, his first name is George, George Carroll, yep.

BW: 13:04 Okay.

AV: 13:04 And they bought it in 1960.

BW: 13:08 Yes, sir.

AV: 13:09 From Phil, but I don't know, I don't remember Phil's last name.

BW: 13:31 Okay.

AV: 13:32 And then they had it together until 1979, and then my dad bought the other half, bought George Carroll out. Tony bought George Carroll out. And then it would have just been under the Vambaketes name.

BW: 13:49 So, the year 1979 crops in? That's when your father, as opposed to 1984?

AV: 13:56 Oh, I don't know. I've seen both dates, Mr. Weaver. I'm not really sure.

BW: 13:59 Right. I see 1984.

AV: 14:02 Was that on that newspaper thing?

BW: 14:04 Yeah.

AV: 14:04 Open that thing up, that newspaper thing,

BW: 14:06 Right.

AV: 14:10 You know what, talking to them old people it was always 1979. But I think I read the same thing as you read. And this was a quote from my dad, and I would think he would have known. Yeah. So, let's go with 84'.

BW: 14:21 Yeah, maybe the beginning of the switchover was starting in 79'. And they finalized it...yeah.

AV: 14:26 Maybe, I'm not sure. But yeah, I read that same thing. Okay. Yeah, it says it right here, "1984." Yeah, let's go with the 84' then. Okay.

BW: 14:38 Alright. So that's good. And so, then 1984.

AV: 14:42 It would have been Tony and John's, and then my grandfather John, let me try to think of when he died, Mr. Weaver. I want to say 2002.

BW: 14:59 Oh, okay. Okay.

AV: 15:04 But if you do a search, you can probably see it on the obituary real fast if you want to make sure it's 100% accurate.

BW: 15:08 Yes, sir. Okay. Okay.

AV: 15:13 And then since then it was my dad's, you know, he's totally owned it. But like I said, I remember Yai yai coming out here when that, you know, after papou [Grandfather] died. Driving out here and making the chili, and making the vegetable soup, and making the stuff pepper soup, so she was working past the year 2000. I mean, like I said, she was probably never official, like, never technically on the books, you know, the way them old Greeks did it. She would have just came out here and worked *pro bono*, I guess.

BW: 15:42 Right.

AV: 15:44 You know, but it would have been for the place; so it would have eventually got down to him. And then my dad, he died in 2019.

BW: 15:56 Right. I remember that.

AV: 15:57 And then since then, it's been us three kids, and mom.

BW: 16:01 Okay, I've got the opportunity, I can skip forward to a question about that. Okay, so then is Johnny the principal owner or is ownership really shared by the family?

AV: 16:18 So, the way it's set up is mom owns the property, and so there's a corporation, Tony's Ranch House, Inc, I think. And then Johnny's the President, I'm the Vice President, and Mary's the Secretary, because you got to have three I think to have a corporation.

BW: 16:36 That's right.

AV: 16:38 So, that's how, that's the current organization right now.

BW: 16:42 And we just leave it like that. The reason I asked that is because when I write up the article, I don't want to put, I don't want to slight anybody.

AV: 16:49 Yeah. Oh, yeah...

BW: 16:50 By saying John is this, or the family.... right

AV: 16:51 Definitely. Johnny does a little more and then Mary definitely does a little more than me. You know those two pretty much do about the same.

BW: 16:59 Right, but in the final analysis It's all four.

AV: 17:03 Yeah, that's all four of us pretty much.

BW: 17:03 It's Incorporated. Okay

AV: 17:05 Yeah. And the corporation pays mom.

BW: 17:08 Okay. Okay. So that's pretty good.

AV: 17:13 Yeah, cool.

BW: 17:28 Okay, what moved, or what motivated grandpa John, your father, Tony, and now your generation to keep the business solvent?

AV: 17:42 Well, I think it's kind of, it's just like, it's part of the culture and the area. You know, these people that you saw in this picture in 1986, those people were like an extension of the family, and families to Greeks, probably back in Greece, but definitely Greek Americans, you know, was a major deal. They came over here, most of them didn't speak the language. So, they had a pretty tight-knit community, but the bar, and the restaurant allowed them to kind of, to expand that, that family, that extended family. So, I think that was kind of part of it. There's always been, you know, times throughout the years where there were rumors, or rumblings that, maybe we'd throw in the towel and sell it and that kind of stuff, but it never made it very far.

BW: 18:29 Uhm hm.

AV: 18:32 And, you know, being on the main thoroughfare right here, and Godfrey has been expanding pretty good since it was incorporated in the 1990s. It's been profitable. So, it's been something that, you know, I don't know if, if Mary's two kids will be interested in being the fourth generation or Johnny's new daughter. But it's always a possibility.

BW: 18:53 Uhm hm. Well, that's excellent information that I can weave into our narrative. Concerning family character, family characteristics. What sets the Vambaketes family business apart? What

differentiates you, if you will, from other restaurant owners, your competitors, if you will—how do you all stand apart?

AV: 19:20 Well, a couple of things. I think, number one, the traditions, being here, people remember coming in with their dad who may have been gone or their great-grandfather who might have been gone. Today, when you came in, there was a big group sitting outside that was a former worker who worked here who passed.

BW: 19:38 Yes, I saw that. Alright. Thank you, sir. And that kind of answers the question “In what concrete ways has the restaurant influenced or been influenced by the Godfrey-Alton region?” I think that kind of hits that.

AV: 19:39 They're having their luncheon out here after that. So, it's kind of the tradition, and then the family has always been real giving to the community, whether it's the high school or whether it's local sports teams. When somebody has a benefit for a sickness or something people know that they can stop in here and we're usually—I can't say all the time—but a majority of the time, willing to give a gift certificate or put together a gift basket that they can raffle off, depending on whatever they got going on. So, I think the two things are just our generosity and traditions. Yeah, it's a place that after the games, you know, the years we got good sports teams in our high schools, after the games, you know, you can come back here and relive the good moments or, kind of talk about the bad moments, sitting around, good fellowship and camaraderie with other community people.

BW: 21:02 So, it allows for a reliable gathering place.

AV: 21:06 Yeah. And it's kind of a blue-collar joint, but at the same time, you'll see the mayor, local leaders, and business leaders also congregating and, you know, so it's, it's a good heterogenous group. Young, old, different socio- economics, that type of stuff.

BW: 21:27 Okay. So, as the customer base goes, it cuts across class, genders...

AV: 21:38 Class, genders, yeah, everything

BW: 21:39 Race. All that. Okay. While we're on this topic, can we discuss a couple of milestones surrounding the business such as some turning points in the history of the Ranch House? Anything pops up in your mind that you can put your hand on?

AV: 22:06 No, I can't right now, I would probably say, you know, I'd have to talk to my mom, because she'd have a better memory of this. But probably like when we did the expansions.

BW: 22:15 Yeah?

AV: 22:16 You know, it'd be one thing that would stick out.

BW: 22:19 So, that's expansions of the physical

AV: 22:21 Of the physical space, yeah.

BW: 22:22 Uh Huh. How many expansions have you all had?

AV: 22:25 I would say at least four.

BW: 22:26 Wow.

AV: 22:27 Because I mean, originally, the grill was up here, and, you know, this counter that's right here, that ran all the way down. And the grill would have been on the end, and you would see, you would see the cook cooking right there.

BW: 22:40 Uhmm.

AV: 22:40 There used to be another door up there. So yeah, I would say at least four, when we added-built the smoking room.

BW: 22:41 Mm hmm.

AV: 22:43 I would say probably four.

BW: 22:53 Okay, any...

AV: 22:54 Let me ask her, and I'll send you an email about the dates on that.

BW: 22:57 Okay. I appreciate that.

AV: 23:01 And then, just like in 19', I mean, in 2020, that was our 60th, the milestones based on how long we had it. So, the 60th anniversary. So next year, we'll be looking at our 65th anniversary; we'll have a little celebration, where we have a Customer Appreciation Day where we sell cheap gyros, and then probably have like a band later in the evening and stuff like that.

BW: 23:28 So, how did that 60th Anniversary go over with COVID, in 2020?

AV: 23:35 We kind of just, well, the customers were great during COVID. I know a lot of places were really worried, and we were worried too. But the customers, even the time when we couldn't even open the doors, we had to serve everything off-site. We were selling quite a bit of to-go food.

BW: 23:54 Oh my goodness,

AV: 23:54 It wasn't good for the employees and that kind of stuff. So, it definitely put a damper on our 60th anniversary. So maybe the 65th will amp it back up. I do remember in 2010 during the 50th, dad did have a party. Like I said, it would have just been a party where we put out probably free appetizers in the evening and had live music in the night, and maybe had drink specials or maybe even had free drinks for the first two hours or something like that.

BW: 24:29 Do you remember the excitement of that? The 50th?

AV: 24:32 I remember dad being super excited.

BW: 24:34 Okay, were you here for that?

AV: 24:35 I was.

BW: 24:36 Or were you at work?

AV: 24:37 I was probably working so I mean, I was probably more, more like

BW: 24:43 Making UBDs and stuff (Chuckles). Staying at the school building until six and seven when

AV: 24:44 Dreading it... I was probably having to work that party too. So, it wasn't probably as much of a celebration. Yeah, because I was probably behind the bar— I was probably on the grill, or I was probably doing something. So yeah, we're looking forward to the 65th. Next year.

BW: 25:13 Okay. Let's talk about the employees just for a couple of seconds here.

AV: 25:22 Alright.

BW: 25:23 From what regions do you draw your employees, and discuss the relationship of the restaurant with employees over the decades?

AV: 25:31 Well, mostly, I would say they're mostly pulled from the Godfrey-Alton region,

BW: 25:37 Right.

AV: 25:38 Maybe a little bit on the outskirts, you know, maybe East Alton, Wood River, even Jerseyville up this direction, but I would say mostly from the core, a little bit of the periphery.

BW: 25:48 Okay, Jersey County?

AV: 25:50 Yeah, Jersey County.

BW: 25:53 Okay,

AV: 25:53 Southern Jersey County, especially, you know, because that's just five or 10 miles that way.

BW: 25:57 Right.

AV: 25:58 Some of the people—we have a cook right now who—she's been here for 44 years. Her name's Lisa, she doesn't work full-time anymore.

BW: 26:06 Is that the lady I saw doing the gyros?

AV: 26:08 No, that's her sister. So, it's almost like we've had families work here. Eric the cook, his mom is Susie, and she used to work here. She retired, so a lot of times, it's like people, when they're in other type of careers, if they get in a bind or something and need a couple hours or something, we've been known to employ them for a little bit. But then we've had some long-standing employees. Employees become pretty close, you know, people become part of the extended family.

BW: 26:59 Right.

AV: 26:59 But you know, they work here for a while, at least I said 40 years. One worked at Famous Barr for a while when they used to have the restaurant over in Jamestown, or Dillard's, when they had their restaurant. But she'd always find her way back here when things wouldn't work out. She worked at the Argosy, or I mean the Alton Belle, when it first opened up—gambling boat—but she would always find her way back. And there's been numerous people like that throughout the years.

BW: 27:29 Along those similar lines, how do you advertise or promote Tony's Ranch House?

AV: 27:34 Oh, well, we do a little bit of advertising in local newspapers and in local radio, just a little bit of local advertising. We're starting to try to be more of a social media presence. But that's something that you have to stay on top of pretty much all the time. And most of it's just word of mouth, and being right here, like I said on Highway 67. That is pretty much the main road in Godfrey. So, but I would say the biggest thing would probably be word of mouth.

BW: 28:09 Yeah. And longevity speaks.

AV: 28:13 Yeah. And longevity. Yeah.

BW: 28:19 Okay, I'm beginning to wind down. I have two more things I want to ask you. When we talk about restaurants and businesses, businesses in general, we are somewhat interested in how the restaurants respond to ups and downs in the economic cycles. We spoke a little bit about it. Can you maybe give me a quick answer or two for each decade? To the best of your memory? Do you remember? Was that particular decade more of an up decade or down decade or whatever, whatever?

Starting when you were a little youngster in the 80s? Do you remember anything about the restaurant? How did it... because in the 80s, it was all about inflation; and it was all about Reaganomics.

AV: 29:12 Yeah, I think, from what I kind of can remember, and then what I kind of remember people talking about the 70s and the early 80s, the place was pretty, I don't want to say profitable or busy because, you know, the way they have things, it's always looks profitable. It always looks pretty steady.

BW: 29:33 Right.

AV: 29:34 But I think it was probably better. And then once you got to the 90s that's when things started getting a little more commercial, and you had Applebee's sprouting up. I remember a lot of my friends talking about going to Applebee's instead of local family establishments like this one. I think since maybe the mid to late 1990s, people have kind of switched their mentality. And now I think a lot of people go to Applebee's and Chili's when they have to out of convenience. But I think a lot of people look for places that are independently owned and operated and local and stuff like that, more townie places.

BW: 30:12 So, your competition became keener, well, more keenly felt in the 90s with Applebee's, Chilis, and the like?

AV: 30:25 But it also could have been, you know, that the old man was just getting kind of burned out and wasn't putting as much energy into it. You know, that's also when he got hired to work at the Argosy.

BW: 30:33 Right.

AV: 30:33 So I don't know if it was related more to like internal issues, as opposed to the external economy, you know what I'm saying?

BW: 30:42 Right, right. Being pulled in different pursuits.

AV: 30:45 Yeah, just putting your energy in other places. Yeah.

BW: 30:48 Right. And so then early, in the 2000s, when I met you.

AV: 30:52 Well, that's when I and Johnny became of age, so we could hang out here. And we were obviously of working age and hanging out age. So, then it was easier to pull from our circle of friends and just associates and acquaintances.

BW: 31:15 So, you were able to reinvigorate the consumer base.

AV: 31:18 I feel like we did. So, my dad was out here by himself, he only had one sister, and she moved up to Chicago as soon as she got married. So, he was pretty much on his own, where, once we three kids got into our early 20s, and definitely mid-20s, we all three had a presence in the area. And I feel like that kind of helped, you know.

BW: 31:37 Right, I can understand that.

AV: 31:38 Yeah.

BW: 31:41 Then we kind of move to the 2010s, which was between 2010 and 2019.

AV: 31:48 And when I first started, until around 2010, then John, that's when Johnny really took over. Because I would have started teaching about two years before that.

BW: 31:58 Right.

AV: 32:00 And then right around that time is when he started his Greek Night, which has been a great success. And our Cheap Cheeseburger Nights on Tuesdays and Thursdays; they started off at \$1 but now they're up to \$2.50. But people just still come out and they don't care what they cost.

BW: 32:20 Right. And what would be a good phrase, a good way to call those? They're not specials. What are they?

AV: 32:30 Well, I mean, they're

BW: 32:31 Greek Night, Cheeseburger Night, this night, that night...

AV: 32:34 They're called "Leaders," like in business, you know, you call them "Leaders."

BW: 32:38 They're called "Leaders?"

AV: 32:39 Like you lead people in with the deal, and then you

BW: 32:41 Then they do more when they get in...

AV: 32:42 You know, it's not really a bait-and-switch type deal because you're not switching anything. But what you see is the price of a cheeseburger, but you don't see the expensive price of the soda or the french fries. You know what I'm saying? Not that it's super expensive.

BW: 32:53 Sure.

AV: 32:55 That's what they call them in economics is a leader.

BW: 32:57 Okay.

AV: 32:58 L-e-a-d-e-r. Yeah,

BW: 32:59 Yeah, I'll kind of stay away from that term. Greek Night. Yes.

AV: 33:04 Well, they are our specials.

BW: 33:05 I'll come up with a good....

AV: 33:07 I mean, the Greek Night is, that's our monthly Greek Night, but the Tuesdays and Thursdays, because we also have specials on those days. So, I don't know that specials is a great, best word.

BW: 33:18 I'll come up with a phrase, I'll put leaders down.

AV: 33:21 Okay,

BW: 33:22 So I can remember

AV: 33:23 Cheap food, yeah, cheap food.

BW: 33:25 Okay, and then last but not least, the COVID Era response, and that would come into now because we are in a rebound. So, what would you say? Would you say the customers have returned in full force?

AV: 33:35 Well, the Godfrey community did really good. So that would have been maybe kind of going along with this last one. The mayor who is good friends with the family, comes to Greek Easter and everything. He had a program where people could buy gift certificates at half price. So, if you bought, if you spent 50 bucks, you get a \$100 gift certificate to these local businesses. And we had to pay some, and then the city paid a little bit from the money they were getting, I think, from the government—from the state government or the federal government for COVID Relief. They would pay that and that was a way that they kind of helped spur local businesses, because some people were buying them and not using them, you know, just to help out the businesses. Other people were buying them and using them, which was fine because we were still getting all of our money. It was pretty much like the city was subsidizing these gift certificates. So that helped out a lot. And then once the doors were able to be back open, man, we're in an area where it's a mixed ideological area. Certain people as soon as the doors opened up, they were ready to come back, regardless of the consequences pretty much. Yes.

BW: 33:43 Okay, okay.

AV: 33:44 You writing a book or an article here Weaver (Chuckles)?

BW: 33:57 I'm just writing an article. Concluding thoughts? I think you already answered it, though. What do you see the restaurant's status in 20 years?

AV: 35:23 Well, in 20 years, I'll be done with teaching. So, I'll probably, you know, if it's still in the family, I mean, I could see me coming out here and still participating and helping out. 20 years, I'll be, still in my 50s. No, I'll be in my 60s in 20 years. My sister's two kids, my niece and nephew, and then Johnny's daughter, you know, it'll be kind of up to them on what we would do with the place. If they have different careers, and if it's no interest, and, there's no way for us to lease it out, or it's just time for us to let somebody else give it a shot... I don't know. I could see one of the three kids being interested enough, keeping it, but I don't know.

BW: 36:10 Okay. But as far you can see, you envision it still being in the family?

AV: 36:17 Probably.

BW: 36:18 Okay. That sounds great. Sounds great.

AV: 36:21 And that sounds better too.

BW: 36:22 Yeah, that sounds great. Well, I tell you what, I think that would be a good concluding thought.

AV: 36:30 Alright, well thank you, Mr. Weaver. I appreciate it. The Vambaketes really appreciate it, the Ranch House Family appreciates it, and I'm looking forward to hanging out with you guys on Saturday.

BW: 36:39 Same here, my friend. Thank you so much. And we'll be signing off on behalf of Madison Historical.