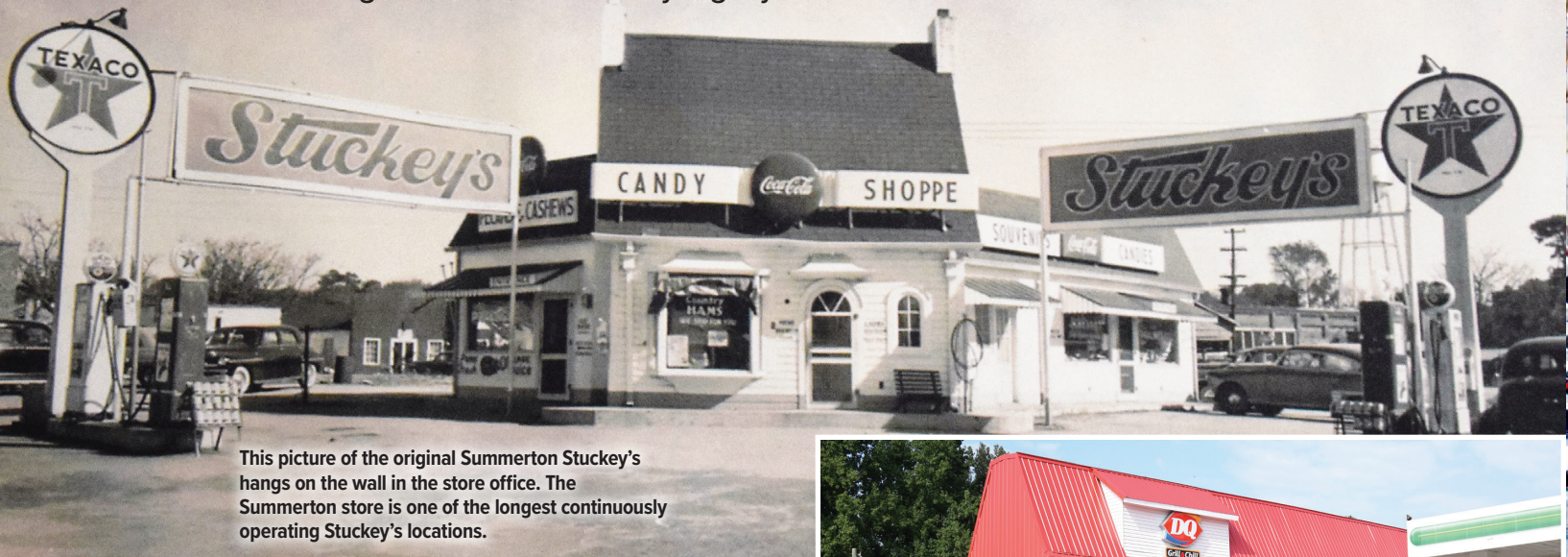


Stuckey's

It's more than a gas station, it's a family legacy



This picture of the original Summerton Stuckey's hangs on the wall in the store office. The Summerton store is one of the longest continuously operating Stuckey's locations.

BY ROB ARDIS

AS YOU MAY have noticed, we love an opportunity from time to time to introduce our readers to some of the very interesting key accounts that Santee Electric Cooperative is fortunate enough to serve. Occasionally, we take a plant tour of a facility to which you would not normally have access. This month's featured member, however, is a place where you can walk right in the front door and look around all you want!

Don't make the mistake of calling it a mere gas station or convenience store—Stuckey's is special! Follow me down Interstate 95, almost to beautiful Lake Marion, and let's stop at Exit 108—Summerton. There, you will find a bright, shining beacon and a reminder of a happier time. At Stuckey's, you can get fuel, a meal, and a healthy dose of nostalgia all in one stop.

I had the great pleasure recently of sitting down with William Putnam, the great-grandson of William Sylvester Stuckey. I wanted to learn more about the history of the brand. I wanted to find out what inspired him to get involved in the family business. And, yes—I wanted to ask him how on earth they managed to keep so many varieties of candy in one store!

We sat in the dining section of Stuckey's. That's right! This location, like many others, has a Dairy Queen inside of it. Blizzard, anyone? If you aren't

careful, you can be so overwhelmed by all of the sites and taste bud temptations around you that you miss what is—in my opinion—the greatest part about being in a Stuckey's. Look up, and you will see that trademark curved Stuckey's ceiling. The slope of the roof catches your eye as you drive down the road, but the real beauty can only be seen from inside the store. "It was designed to look like the hull of a great wooden ship," says Putnam. The polished, sturdy hardwood making up the beautiful ceiling cannot be easy to maintain. "It's not," he says, "but it's our trademark."

Stuckey's started with a simple roadside pecan stand in the 1930's in Eastman, Georgia. Putnam reports that the real stroke of genius was when W. S. Stuckey convinced his wife, Ethel, to start making divinity and those now-famous pecan log rolls to sell along with the nuts.

There is an awesome history book devoted to the Stuckey's brand, and in it you can find a picture of the original Summerton Stuckey's that was located at the intersection of US 15 and US 301 in town. It is clear from the picture

Stuckey employees (from left) Jeff Carter, Walt Braddock, and Niasia Gilyard with William Putnam, great-grandson of Stuckey's founder William Sylvester Stuckey. "When I learned my grandfather needed help reviving the business for which my family was famous," Putnam says, "I knew I had to help."



that, while they proudly sold Texaco gasoline, they wanted you to know that, first and foremost, they were a "Candy Shoppe!" While it is not clear exactly when the Summerton Stuckey's began, it is showcased in a magazine layout from the early 1950's as one of the first "16 locations to serve you."

From these original 16 stores, Stuckey's quickly grew to a peak of over 300 locations by the 1970's. A sale to Pet (the milk company), more competition along the interstates, and changing times all had some impact on the chain so that its prominence fell off from the icon that



The ceilings of Stuckey's stores aren't easy to clean, says William Putnam, but "it's our trademark. It was designed to look like the hull of a great wooden ship," says Putnam.



it was in its heyday.

William Putnam says that they are turning that around. After his grandfather, former Georgia congressman Bill Stuckey, Jr., bought the company back from Pet, he learned that the third generation of the family did not necessarily have the appetite or energy to help revive the dynasty his father started. From there, he turned to an unlikely solution—the fourth generation in the family that was not even born when Stuckey's was at its peak! "I was making a living training horses in Eastman," 31-year-old Putnam says. "Our family was in the banking business, the timber business, and we even owned a few pawn shops. But, when I learned my grandfather needed help reviving the business for which my family was famous, I knew I had to help."



Putnam now owns and operates this Stuckey's in Summerton himself. He attributes the success of this location to several things. "Bringing in customers is not automatic when you are sandwiched between Manning and Santee" (two significantly busier stops along I-95). Stuckey's finds success by providing gas, food, and novelties. "Those are the machines that keep the success growing. When one is low, another will be high."

Speaking of novelties, Putnam says their metal signs are a big seller. Everything from support of your favorite college team to catchy phrases that appeal to fishermen all around Lake Marion can be purchased for display on the walls of your man cave. There is also a wide variety of t-shirts and other gifts for your shopping pleasure.

Since it seems that Stuckey's really took off, at least in part, because of great-grandmother Ethel's candies, we cannot wrap up without talking about sweets! Of course, you'll see a huge selection of candies that you can find in most convenience stores. However, to this, the Summerton Stuckey's adds a wall of jams, jellies, and preserves. And let's not forget, there's that famous selection of Stuckey's brand candies including the pecan log roll, divinity, and an item that I had never heard of. "You can't leave without a bag of Hunkey Dorey," Putnam assured me. "It's one of our top sellers." Picture caramelized popcorn with almonds and

pecans—I'm now a Hunkey Dorey fan!

There is also a huge selection of various sodas. Having trouble finding that soft drink brand you are looking for? Try a Stuckey's! I have had a hard time finding Sun Drop since I left Knoxville after college...and Diet A&W Root Beer—forget about it. But you can find them—ice cold—at Stuckey's. When I asked how difficult it was to maintain such a variety on the shelves, Putnam simply responded, "It's definitely not easy, but it's what we are known for."

Take my word for it...the next time you are passing through on I-95 or are in the Summerton area, stop in at Stuckey's. Grab that cream soda you were having a hard time finding. Have a Blizzard. Fuel up, and grab some of that great Stuckey's candy while you are at it. And, of course, please do not forget to take a few moments to look up at the ceiling. You are witnessing the history of an icon.

If you can, visit the Stuckey's in Summerton, which is proudly served by Santee Electric Cooperative. Buy a pecan roll while you're there.



MARY GRACE MCGEE