

CHATSWORTH PAST & PRESENT

By Ann Vincent

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Owned and operated by Buck Barker and family, The Munch Box is one of Chatsworth's Historic-Cultural Landmarks. It is located at 21532 Devonshire St. in Chatsworth.

Buck's Uncle John and Aunt Linda owned The Munch Box for the first 30 years, with Buck and his wife, Claire following in their footsteps. It has remained a family-owned operation now for 53 years. Opened in 1956, the menu has remained basically the same with hickory burgers, mushroom burgers and chili dogs to name a few. Some things have changed over the years--root beer is no longer made on the premises and sold for 10 cents, but the root beer float is still the popular drink. The hitching post to tie up your horse used to be directly behind the building and is now gone.

I was once told that in the 50-60's, schedules permitting, that the freight train conductors would make a point of stopping the train at the Munch Box for lunch. Located along the tracks it would have been convenient.

In 2002, the Munch Box was threatened with the surrounding development of a shopping center and storage facility on the property site. Fortunately, efforts had already been initiated by the Chatsworth Historical Society to identify this as a landmark, and with the help of community petition drives and over 1700 letters, Cultural Historical Landmark status was pushed through in time to save The Munch Box.

On June 3, 2003, Councilman Hal Bernson successfully took the recommendation to the City Council. He referred to the Munch Box as an integral part of the old Chatsworth community and a direct link with its past. He also noted that most of these types of establishments that once abounded no longer exist and are only seen in old photographs or movie clips. The Los Angeles City Council unanimously passed the motion, without discussion. With that vote, The Munch Box was recognized as Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument #750.



Huell Howser and Buck Barker

Celebrating the event, Huell Howser was invited to The Munch Box to see what sites Chatsworth has to offer. His program included an interview with Buck and his wife Claire discussing the history of the family business.



The Munch Box in 2003.



2009 Photo showing extended covered patio dining with original stools for seating in front. The new shopping center can be seen in the background.

When interviewed by Huell, Buck referred to himself more as a "caretaker" of the original establishment. Many of the diners were interviewed by Huell as he quizzed them on their favorite menu items.

To prove to Huell that the Munch Box one of our local icons, Linda and Andre van der Valk displayed a painting by local artist Marty Bell. She had featured The Munch Box as one of a series of four Chatsworth paintings. Others included The Pioneer Church, Stoney Point, and The Chatsworth Florist.

In 2004, the surroundings changed as a new shopping center and storage facility grew around it. To accommodate the crowds, covered tables and wind/rain shades now make it easier to hang out and enjoy your food regardless of the weather. Parking is marked now...not the original dirt lot behind that was always so packed full you wondered how you would maneuver through the cars.



Marty Bell painting of The Munch Box as shown to Huell Howser by Linda and Andre van der Valk during The Munch Box filming

Still a meeting place and favorite place to drop by, The Munch Box also has been known to have antique car collectors gather to show off their 50's style rides.

I regularly stop by with family for my Hickory Burger and Fries, and always look forward to my childhood favorite, the Root Beer Float.

Chatsworth Historical Society – April 2009