

**Cass Diner (1948-1974) 2934 Brunswick Pike (Rt. 1 at Bakers Basin Road in Lawrenceville, New Jersey).**

*Compiled by Carla Cielo with*

*Personal communication with Cosmo Giordano's step daughter Marilyn Cupido, June 25, 2014.*

*Personal Communication with Cosmo Giordano's granddaughter Marcia Minunni*

*Email correspondence with Lawrenceville historian Dennis Waters.*

*Email correspondence with former Lawrenceville Police Chief Nicholas Loveless*

Cosmo Giordano (1914-1990) was from Vineland, NJ and began working in the restaurant business in 1932. He learned his trade by working for his friend Russell Taleno who owned the Calhoun Diner at 1710 Calhoun Street in Trenton. He was also a horseman and often spoke of his days as a jockey in California. He met his wife, Marion, during the war years. She had been previously married and was from New York State. She came to New Jersey to bring military supplies to Fort Dix; Marilyn did not know if they met in a restaurant or elsewhere.

Cosmo opened Cass's Hamilton Diner on Brunswick Pike in or about 1948 - it was made of wood and stood across the street from the current Mercer Co. Library, near the old Cowan Trucking Company - a photo of it remains in the family collection. Cosmo changed its name to "Cass's Diner" and relocated to 2934 Brunswick Pike in about 1954, with the installation of a brand new Mountain View Diner. The diner was delivered down Route 1 from the manufacturer in Singac, NJ and was positioned in front of a permanent supporting structure across the rear. At that time, most of the diners were wood; the shiny Mountain View Diner was considered up-and-coming and modern. The diner part had a lunch counter with a soda fountain and a juke box at every booth that played 45's. The back extension was accessed by swinging doors from the diner. It had a big kitchen with a range, a phone booth, and Cosmo's office. There was a basement under both sections. Cosmo's nickname was Cass and thus the diners were named for him. He was friendly and outgoing and knew most of his customers by name.

The Mountain View Diner Company was established by Les Daniel and Henry Stry on Rt 23 in the Singac section of Little Falls, New Jersey in 1938 to manufacture prefabricated diners. The company built some 400 pre-fab diners and its motto was: "A Mountain View Diner will last a lifetime." The company closed in 1957. This diner is thought to be one of five surviving in New Jersey. Bilal's Oasis Diner in Trenton, New Jersey is also a Mountain View Diner.

The diner served the local community. Important scientists like Robert Oppenheimer a physicist who developed nuclear weapons and Albert Einstein were frequent customers as were truck drivers, Lawrenceville police officers and the mafioso. They came for the "great "home" cooked food, good conversation and genuine hospitality." All walks of life were equal under the stainless steel roof.

There was “Pinky” Costello, one of the top racketeer in the Trenton area, who ran the cigarette concessions. Sam DeCavalcante (Sam the Plumber) who oversaw illegal gambling, loansharking and labor racketeering and lived in Lawrenceville, had his favorite stool. Marilyn said that he was “quite handsome.” And there was “Smitty” who ran the juke box concessions and periodically changed the songs in the juke box. Marilyn liked to keep the old 45’s which would otherwise have been discarded. Former Lawrenceville Police Chief Nicholas Loveless said that the diner was frequented by Lawrence police officers so often, that they sometimes referred to it as the 2<sup>nd</sup> precinct. Alice Fehen was a waitress and read Tarot cards in a back booth. According to Cass’s granddaughter Marcia Minunni, it was a simpler time.

There was a standard, reasonably priced menu that included, navy bean and beef stew, Manhattan Clam Chowder on Fridays and puddings for dessert and additional daily special. All of the food was home made including the mash potatoes and puddings. The rice and tapioca pudding were favorites amongst the truck drivers and were made from scratch. There were only three flavors of milkshakes; Vanilla, Chocolate and Strawberry. Fresh ingredients were used sourced from the local food distributors.

Cass and his wife (who worked right along side her husband) worked seven days a week beginning at 6:30 am and ending at 11:30 pm at night with a short break in the afternoon. However, Marcia said she frequently saw her grandfather “stealing a nap in the back booth.” Cass and his wife went home on their afternoon break since they lived nearby off Princeton Pike. After work, Cass went down to Trenton for the newspaper (probably the next days) and a little down time. His wife accompanied him on occasion. They never took a vacation; recreation was an occasional visit to the local race track with friends. It was a family business with three generations working together. Marilyn Cupido worked there for 7 years before attending nursing school. The diner served as a babysitter for Cass’s granddaughter when she was between the ages of 3 and 6. Older grandchildren worked odd jobs in the diner after school. In 1974, Cosmo sold the property to Beatrice Greenberg of Mrs. G’s appliance emporium which was housed in the neighboring building. Mrs. G. grew up in Atlantic City and began selling appliances in a storefront on Warren Street. She was honored as one of the top 100 appliance dealers in the US in 1967. Mrs G. leased the diner to various establishments. Her descendants retained ownership of the property until selling for redevelopment in recent years. The diner was never called Mrs G. Cosmo retired to Florida in 1976.



**Ben's Diner (c.1974-c. 1977) 2934 Rt. 1**

Ben's Diner was operated by Dorothy and Leonard Greenberg who were likely related to Beatrice Greenberg. Leonard Greenberg once owned Ben's delicatessen on Market Street in Trenton. Both were apparently named for their son Benjamin.

**Asher Grice's PDG Diner (1977-1979)**

Asher Grice took over Ben's Diner in April 1977, but left the Ben's diner sign up and so it continued to be known as such. "PGD" was named after his sons Philip and David Grice and jokingly for the phrases "Pretty Darn Good" or "Pork's Darn Good." A test commercial with 6 animals was filmed in November 1977.



Photo taken April 3, 1983 by Larry Cultrera

**Unoccupied 1979-1981**

Ben's diner sign remaining.

**"Henry Beck's - A distinctive Eatery" (1981-?)** Henry Gill and Becky Schmierer attempted to make the diner an upscale dinner place. They covered the sea-green vinyl counter stools with upholstery, parquet tables replaced the booths, barn wood was installed over the tiled walls.



It had various, short-lived names in the 1980s.

Eventually Mrs G. turned it into a plumbing store.

The diner sat vacant for about 25 years before being moved to Hamilton in 2014.



Photo taken April 3, 1983 by Larry Cultrera



Photo taken July 1984 by Jim Fischer



Complements of the Lawrenceville Township.