

ROTTERDAM

## Hungry Chicken Country Store a labor of love

BY CHARLES ERICKSON  
For The Daily Gazette

Hungry Chicken Country Store, the first commercial enterprise encountered by motorists after they roll onto Route 5S at its eastern terminus, is located just beyond the trumpet interchanges and sweeping ramps that bring cars and trucks traveling on I-890 to the NYS Thruway, across the Mohawk River to Route 5, or to Route 5S, which is also known here as River Road.

All this civil engineering is hidden from view at the store, at 661 River Road, because of the topography. Hungry Chicken — which sits along an incline from the highway — seems more remote and rural than an establishment located in the environs of Schenectady.

“We try to keep things different,” said Ginny Milgo, the manager, as she looked at the inventory of coffee, bicycle magnets and dog treats inside the small store. Nearby, accompanied by crackling sounds and pleasant smells, one of her six subordinates was making a chicken filet sandwich on a broiler. “We try to keep it as local as we can, or we make sure it’s tried and true.”

The buyers of that chicken sandwich, Hank and Rhonda Becker from Rotterdam, browsed the store while the food was being prepared.

“This is our first time ever here,” Rhonda Becker said. She said she had read about the Hungry Chicken Country Store in a social media post.

“We came to see what the place was like,” added Hank Becker.

The store was opened in May 2017 by the spouses



CHARLES ERICKSON/FOR THE DAILY GAZETTE

Hungry Chicken Country Store opened in 2017, at the site of the former Apple Junction Country Store in Rotterdam.

Louise Dickinson and Jeff Klein, a year after they purchased the 10-acre property which also includes a house and an apple orchard. Dickinson, a retired General Electric engineer, and Klein, an IT specialist, took their marriage vows while standing in the orchard. Hungry Chicken Country Store operates from the former Apple Junction Country Store, which had been dormant for years.

“Last year was the first year we made any profit,” Dickinson said. “It’s been a struggle. It’s a lot of hard work and a lot of hours.”

Klein nodded at his wife’s summary of business conditions. “It’s been an adventure,” he said.

It is common to find customers inside wearing bicycle helmets. A section of the Canalway Trail passes by the store on the other side of River Road.

Todd Johnston of Scotia was helmeted on a recent Saturday afternoon along with his children, Caleb and Caitlyn.

“It was a late-breaking decision to stop,” Johnston said. “It’s a reward for a ride on

the trail, right?” he asked his offspring. All three of them had cones which held soft-serve pistachio ice cream. The cones had been drawn from the ice cream machine by the same employee that had made the chicken sandwich.

Johnston said he had been patronizing the store for several years, and frequently — after he arrived by car — bought eggs, pies and honey.

Milgo and Dickinson know there are many places where motorists can pull off a road and buy foods and gifts. There are chain convenience stores and other independent stores, and these commonly sell gasoline.

There are no gas pumps at the Hungry Chicken Country Store but there are handcrafted products that cannot be found in any of the outlets operated by the competition.

“The owner makes the candles and the hummingbird feeders and the stained glass,” Milgo said. “I make the cat beds and the cat toys and the stuffed animals.”

Hungry Chicken Country Store opens at 7 a.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. on



CHARLES ERICKSON/FOR THE DAILY GAZETTE

Jeff Klein and Louise Dickinson inside their business, Hungry Chicken Country Store, which they opened in Rotterdam in 2017.

weekends, and stays open until 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and until 5 p.m. Friday through Sunday.

Apples and ciders are offered every year after the fruits ripen in the orchard behind the store building. Apple butter, grape jelly, strawberry rhubarb jam and other spreads are made and sold under the Hungry Chicken Country Store label. Baked goods are prepared in a downstairs kitchen.

Other products, not manufactured here, are carried because they are not ubiquitous in other stores. Pickles are sourced from Martin’s Kitchen, based in the Finger Lakes region. Sauces come from Terrapin Ridge Farms, a Florida company, and are carried because Dickinson and Klein spotted them being

sold in the Vermont Country Store in Weston, Vermont.

“We really like it there,”

Klein said about the Green Mountain general store. The owners of the Rotterdam country store say they are inspired by the enterprise in Weston, which was opened in 1946 and remains in family hands.

Breakfast sandwiches are big sellers, according to Milgo. They are made to order and not produced in quantity ahead of the morning rush. They do not rotate for hours in a warming case, the manager stressed.

Chicken filet sandwiches were only added to the menu last year. They come with three sauces: spicy chipotle and sriracha, barbecue and honey, and garlic parmesan. “Because of the name of

the store, people were always curious to know why we didn’t have chicken,” Dickinson said.

The store’s moniker comes from a drawing made by Joe Dickinson, Louise’s son and a student in the arts program run by Living Resources. That drawing, Louise Dickinson said with a laugh, looked like an angry chicken — but Hungry Chicken seemed a better name for a store that sold edibles. Joe Dickinson also makes some of the gift items that are for sale in the shop.

“This place, it’s kind of a labor of love for the community,” Louise Dickinson said. “Some days are more challenging than others. But we try to keep it old-fashioned and have things you can’t buy anywhere else.”

## Defense was key in 1961 Amsterdam softball match

“Will it be a Highland Fling or an Hawaiian Hula that is danced tonight,” wondered Recorder sportswriter Bob Wischmeyer.

Amsterdam’s attention that August was focused on competition for the city men’s softball league title between the Hawaiian Klub on Church Street on Reid Hill and Burza’s Highland House on upper Locust Avenue.

Nationally in 1961, Roger Maris hit 61 home runs. Mickey Mantle was the highest-paid baseball player, making \$75,000 that season. The Yankees went on to win the World Series.

Sports teams based at the Hawaiian Klub had been covered on local sports pages since 1950. Earlier in 1961, athletic Stanley Burza and his wife Irene purchased the Highland House on upper Locust Avenue.

The Hawaiian Klub won the first game 2-1. The Highlanders took the second contest 6-1. The games took place at one of the fields behind what was then Lynch High School on Brandt Place.

The deciding game was 6 p.m. sharp on a Monday.

Wischmeyer wrote, “Defense told the story last night. Burza’s Highland House played without an error and turned in two double plays to defeat the Hawaiian Klub 5-1.”

Burza played third base, was team manager and part of one of the double plays. He played softball for 50 years. State Assemblyman Donald Campbell was on the Highlander team along with other Amsterdam notables such as Bud Heck and Fred Sandy.

Among those on the Klub roster were Gene Bik, Fred Cerasaro, Chuck Pettengill and Dave Quick.

Stan Burza and Irene Drozd met at Mohawk Carpet Mills where they both worked. Stan also inflated footballs at Collette Manufacturing on Clizbe Avenue and drove a truck for Iroquois Chemical on Edward Street.

During World War II, he served in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific including the liberation of the Philippine Islands.

Stan tended bar at the Highland House. He made a ritual of saying good night to you by name when you left the tavern, with a friendly but cautionary formula that went some-



**Bob Cudmore**  
FOCUS ON HISTORY

thing like this, “Good night, Bob. Don’t slip on the ice. Don’t step on Irene’s tulips.”

Irene recalled in a 1986 newspaper article that she once asked a young man to take his feet off the furniture in the tavern. When he replied she sounded like his mother, her response was, “When you’re here, I am your mother.”

Reader Ron Johnson recalled that if you asked Stan for a match, his response was, “I have matches to burn.” Johnson said Irene brought out plates of kielbasa after midnight on Friday nights since Catholics could not eat meat on Fridays.

The tavern had a Wall of Honor where clippings were posted when patrons rolled a 300 game in bowling, got a hole in one in golf or did something outstanding in scholastics or community life. The clippings have been donated to the Walter Elwood Museum.

The Burzas closed the tavern in 1986. Irene died in 1990. Six years later Stan married Rita Loughrey, a woman he had met through one of his two daughters.

Rita said Stan enjoyed being useful. He took up skiing in his seventies and went with Rita on a ski trip to France for their honeymoon.

A frequent golf partner in later years was Charles Brown of Hagaman. Brown came to the area in 1965 and started going to Burza’s. Brown was a faithful visitor when Stan spent his last days at River Ridge Living Center.

Stan died Nov. 2, 2010 at 92. He was buried with military honors at St. Stanislaus Cemetery. He was a member of the Good Shepherd Polish National Church.



PHOTO COURTESY CAT FANCIERS’ ASSOCIATION

A judge examines a cat at previous CFA Cat Show.

SARATOGA SPRINGS

## North Atlantic Regional Cat Show to be held this weekend

BY KRISTINA HANDY  
The Daily Gazette

Step aside race horses — the cool cats are in town.

This weekend, the Saratoga Springs City Center will be taken over by more than 100 cats for the North Atlantic Regional Cat Show.

“It’s going to be rows and rows of cats,” said Chris June, the CFA’s North Atlantic region mentor coordinator for new exhibitors and breeders. “It’s such a wonderful way to meet new friends who love cats.”

Presented by the Cat Fanciers’ Association, a not-for-profit organization that holds cat expos and shows around the world, the two-day cat show will showcase over 35 different cat breeds — from Maine coon to Norwegian forest to ragdoll — as they prove their prowess for a panel of 11 judges.

The cats will be grouped into different classes depending on their age, breed and history to compete for best in show.

“You’ll see a judging ring with kittens, and next door is the judging ring of household pets, and next to that is the spayed and neuter premierships,” June said. “It’s very informative and educational.”

The accredited judges will take note of each cat’s physical characteristics to determine how well they align with their specific breed’s written standard, June explained.

“In other words, the ears are supposed to be in a certain place on the cat, the nose is supposed to be a certain length, the coat is supposed to be a certain length and texture,” June said. “If a cat has a big fault — like the coat color is not what it should be — depending on the breed, they may lose a lot of points.”

The cats will begin by being judged against others of their same breed and, by the end of the round, one from each grouping will be selected as the winner. Each “best of breed” winner will then compete against each other before 10 finalists are chosen to compete for the final prize.

“From there, you get ranked nationally or regionally,” June said.

But this competition is only a fraction of the event. The day will also feature agility contests and cat costume contests where owners can dress up their feline friends. Winners will receive Amazon gift cards.

“The costume contest draws the public into our shows because who doesn’t like watch-

ing a pedigree cat get dressed up like a bumblebee?” June said. “It’s so funny and they act so funny, but it also shows them that, yeah, these are show cats but they’re also our pets and our companions.”

A number of vendors will also set up shop at the event, including Arubacats Furniture, Sturdi Sue and Freddy’s Cat-atonic Catnip Toyz. The Animal League’s Adirondack Region Cat Adoption Center will be onsite sharing photos of adoptable pets and accepting donations.

“The interaction of people — that’s what I really like. I’m not there just to sell stuff,” said Jennifer Rose, the owner and creator of Freddy’s Cat-atonic Catnip Toyz. “There are just so many cat lovers in this world and to be amongst them is just great.”

The North Atlantic Regional Cat Show will take place this Saturday and Sunday at the Saratoga Springs City Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. The first 100 children to enter will receive a free cat coloring book.

Tickets can be purchased at the doors with credit card, debit card or cash for \$15 for adults and kids over 12 years old, \$10 for seniors and children and free for children under the age of five.