

Sno-Flake celebrating 50 years of flipping burgers in Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Even after being harassed by his family every night for years that he smelled like French fries when he came home from work doesn't keep Bill Schneider away from the Sno-Flake Drive-In.

He and his wife, Trudy, eat at the old-style hamburger joint every time they come to South Lake Tahoe – which is about once a month. The Minden couple owned the restaurant from 1989 to about 1992.



Trudy and Bill Schneider used to own the Sno-Flake.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

On Monday they were in town for their usual – turkey burgers.

Sno-Flake is in its 50th year, having opened July 19, 1961.

“When we bought it there was a lot of Mexican food. We changed it to hamburgers, French fries, chili and hotdogs,” Bill Schneider said as his burger and chili were delivered.

During their ownership it was the Alpine burger what was popular. The burger with Swiss cheese and a slice of ham is no longer on the menu.

“We didn’t make much money on it, but we had a lot of customers,” Schneider said.

For current owners Duncan and Lisa Sennott it is the \$5.79 Tahoe burger that is the best seller. It comes with sautéed mushrooms, onions and Monterey jack cheese.

The Sennotts have owned the Sno-Flake for six years, having bought it from Pete and Susie Richards. The Richards bought it from the Schneiders.



The Sno-Flake will be 50-years-old in 2011.

Every owner has made changes to the building as well as to the menu.

Duncan Sennott said regulars won’t let him take things off the menu, so he spends time adding to it. The one thing he did eliminate was the deep fried burritos.

“We have probably doubled the milkshakes and the health options,” Sennott said.

The Oreo shake is the most popular, but the seasonal shakes like the eggnog and pumpkin, which he is whipping up now, sell no matter the outside temperature.

Upgrading the ingredients started early, which includes using as much fresh stuff as possible.

“I wanted to make sure the food really tasted great,” Sennott said. “There’s not much I can cut. The burgers all have a following.”



Cook Rene Rizo
mans the
kitchen.

He said some people have been getting the same burger for the last 20 years.

The couple left life in corporate America to operate the burger joint. He used to be in international banking in San Francisco, while she was an attorney in the Bay Area. Lisa, who was his fiancée when they bought the place, now works for Laub & Laub.

Since buying the place they’ve added to their family. They have a 4-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son.

Duncan Sennott spends at least five days a week at the low-key eatery doing a bit of everything.

“I had been taking cooking classes at the culinary academy for years. We moved here and it seemed like a natural change,” Sennott said. He has no regrets, but admits it’s harder work than he ever imagined.

It’s the little things like being closed three days last week because the fire suppression system went off.

He's not sure why Sno-Flake has lasted 50 years. Partly he thinks it's the old building.



Sno-Flake workers know many customers by name.

"It's a time warp to my childhood," Sennott said.

Consistently good, hot food are other reasons. Location hasn't hurt either – being walking distance to El Dorado Beach. Lines are the norm during the summer. It's one of the few places to get soft serve cones on the South Shore. French fry connoisseurs (like this reporter) swear by their fries.

As for how to celebrate Sno-Flake turning 50, Sennott doesn't have all that worked out. But he is entertaining rolling back prices to 1961 – if only for a day.