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An icon of Chiefland passes away



Ralph A. Dahlstrom Jr. at work at the Burger House. Customers could often see him cooking at the establishment he created 40 years ago.

Photo Provided

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CHIEFLAND -- A man who had a passion for providing delicious hamburgers, hash browns (tater tots), French fries and other treats passed away Monday (Jan. 18) at the age of 82.

Ralph A. Dahlstrom Jr. created Ralph's Burger House and generations of patrons drove through the drive-through in Chiefland, always leaving with a smile.

He established a second Ralph's Burger House location recently in Chiefland. He was an icon in Chiefland, and his work ethic was legendary.

Ralph's Burger House has been in Chiefland for 40 years now. Before establishing Ralph's in Chiefland, he had opened the first In & Out Restaurant in Gainesville in 1959.

Christina Story worked for Dahlstrom for several years before she became a teacher. She spoke about her friend and former employer. Dahlstrom employs 42 people now, and this is a significant number for a home-owned business in the Tri-County Area of Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties.

One thing that stood out about the man was his love for the service he provided. He would work 12 to 15 hours a day, Story said. When workers came in at 9 or 10 a.m., they would see him there and when the Burger House closed at 9 or 10 at night, he would be the last one out, Story said.

"He was loyal to his customers," she said. "He wanted his sandwiches to look good and taste good. He was a hard worker. And he would give people second chances."

He was not one to be crossed, though, even in his later years. One would-be robber fought with him and Dahlstrom won that fight, with the Chiefland Police Department coming in to take

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away the would-be robber in handcuffs. Yes the business owner suffered some injury in that fight, but he prevented a thief from taking advantage of him on that occasion.

Dahlstrom had a good sense of humor too, she said.

Another important aspect about the life of Ralph A. Dahlstrom, Jr. in Chiefland was that he gave back to the community – especially to the young people. He donated a grill to the Chiefland High School Girls Softball Team, Story said.

He bought a cake for \$200 recently to help the band. He gave money to the Future Business Leaders of America chapter at CHS, she said. And he has donated gift cards to help students.

Over the past four decades, Dahlstrom's positive impact on the children in the Tri-County Area is substantial and noteworthy.

He was survived by his children, a son, Dale Dahlstrom of Tampa; two daughters, Deanna Deese of Gainesville, and Debra (Roger) Huffman of Ashville, N.C.; seven grandchildren, Justin Deese, Gainesville, Erica Deese, Gainesville, Kimberly Ward, Chiefland, Jonathan (Samantha) Rain, Chiefland, Tabatha (Kevin) Hoover, Williston, Aaron Dahlstrom, Ashville, N.C., and Taylor Huffman, Hickory, N.C.; and eight great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by a son, Dana Dahlstrom.

Services were on Friday afternoon (Jan. 22) at the Knauff Funeral Home Chapel in Chiefland. Expressions of sympathy may be made to Haven Hospice in Chiefland.

Arrangements are under the direction of Knauff Funeral Home in Chiefland.

The two Ralph's Burger House locations in Chiefland were closed on Friday from 1 to 5 p.m., Story said, but then they will re-open, because this is what Ralph would want.

After that, Ralph's Burger House will continue during its regular business hours and the legacy will continue.