

THE PRESS - ENTERPRISE

THESE MCMEMORIES SUPERSIZED

McDonald's Museum keeps legacy of the fast-food restaurant alive

BY CINDY MARTINEZ RHODES
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SAN BERNARDINO

Without apologies, Albert Okura admits he loves fast food. He has made chicken his livelihood as the founder of the Juan Pollo restaurant chain, but he says his first love was the hamburger.

"In 1961, McDonald's came to Wilmington," Okura said. "They had 15 cent hamburgers. It was the greatest thing in my life."

Okura purchased the building where the original McDonald's began — on 14th and E streets in San Bernardino — for his corporate headquarters. His business may be chicken, but his passion remains with the burger. So much so that he created a McDonald's Museum.

The museum houses hundreds of pieces of McDonald's memorabilia, from the original straw papers that have the McDonald's name and San Bernardino address, to the modern-day Happy Meal. And don't forget the toys, the crazy, kitschy, sometimes-they-even-work toys.

Okura and one of his curators, Jack Marcus, have amassed cases full of McToys. McDonald's began serving a kid-size meal in a fun box in 1979, and

The McDonald's corporation is not affiliated with the museum.

Okura says the corporation's history begins with Ray Kroc and his idea for franchising. Okura's museum honors the McDonald brothers, their burger and their business model that emphasized speed, lower prices and volume.

There is a large collection of photos and memorabilia from the 1940s and '50s, including old uniforms, signage and pictures of carhops.

But it's the personal history and stories that have stirred people's McMemories.

"I've given tours to teachers and they're shocked that people don't use our museum more for history lessons," Joanne Fuentes, one of the curators, said.

The McDonald's Museum is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. It is free to the public. For information or to set-up a tour, call 909-885-6324.



CINDY MARTINEZ RHODES: THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE
Albert Okura, founder of Juan Pollo restaurants, owns the building which is the site of the McDonald's Museum on 14th and E Streets in San Bernardino.

included a toy in the mix. This began the collector's craze that has grown men and women sometimes eating Happy Meals for weeks to collect an entire set.

They have toys from the collectable — like the mini Beanie Babies and hard-to-find McDonald's characters, to the dated and truly bizarre, like a Michael Jordan flying disc and plastic McNuggets in Halloween costumes.

Okura shakes his head when he thinks of the history that could have been lost had he not seen the foreclosure notice in a newspaper and known the history of the property.

"It's my destiny," Okura said. "The McDonald brothers and Ray Kroc were at the right place at the right time in history, when hamburgers were king."

MCHISTORY TIMELINE

1940 — Brothers Maurice and Richard McDonald open McDonald's Barbeque Restaurant at 14th and E Streets in San Bernardino.

1948 — They open original McDonald's restaurant selling 15 cent hamburgers and 10 cent fries.

1953 — Open second restaurant in Phoenix that includes the golden arches on the building. They update the San Bernardino site with golden arches.

1955 — Ray Kroc visits McDonald's in San Bernardino and convinces brothers to let him franchise.

1961 — Kroc buys out McDonald brothers for \$2.7 million.

1963 — Ronald McDonald is introduced. So is the Filet-O-Fish sandwich.

1968 — The Big Mac is on the menu.

1972 — McDonald's introduces the Quarter Pounder and Egg McMuffin.

1979 — Happy Meal officially begins

1984 — Ray Kroc dies at 81.

1992 — McDonald's Corporation approves the San Bernardino site as the world's first McDonald's drive-in restaurant.

1996 — McDonald's is inducted into the San Bernardino Route 66 Crusin Hall of Fame.

1998 — Celebrate 50th anniversary of McDonald's at site where it all started: in San Bernardino.