

Features

Sales good despite beef scandal

United Press International
DALLAS — Texans have been notorious beef-lovers since the first cowpoke poked his first longhorn steer down the Chisholm Trail. Texans like beef singed over mesquite, barbecued exotically or ground into hamburger patties. Yet Texas this summer was the

center of a scandal that rocked the international meat industry. Australian meat headed for a Dallas fast-food restaurant distribution center was found to contain horsemeat. Later shipments were halted when kangaroo meat was identified. Hamburger sales across the nation took a nosedive.

But did Texans shy away from their burger habits?

"Not on your life," said Glen Potter, assistant manager of a north Dallas Burger King restaurant. "As long as there is a beef cow somewhere, Texans will eat beef. Our business has never been better since that kangaroo story broke loose in Australia."

Potter also said local burger business in general has been hopping. "This place alone increased hamburger sales 8-10 percent."

Federal inspectors said they found all the bad beef before it made it to consumers, but the publicity did its damage.

"We at Jack-in-the-Box feel we were unfairly blamed for the scandal," said Kurt Gustafson, zone operations manager for Texas Jack-in-the-Box restaurants. "We were the ones who first discovered and reported the bad beef in Dal-

las and we never used any. However, our name has been linked to the business ever since."

Gustafson said sales at the company are picking up steadily, despite an initial dip when the story broke. He declined to give any figures.

Even so, he said sales are picking up steadily, despite taking an initial dip. He declined to give any figures though.

"We're building back up. After all, in Texas people like beef, probably more than in other parts of the country. We're very optimistic we'll be back to normal pretty soon. There's no question that Texas in particular will continue to be a prime market for us."

Some food businesses even figure all the hoopla stoked customer appetites.

"I'd say the bad beef story had a

positive effect on our business," said Dan Gabriel, assistant manager of a west Dallas McDonald's. "We have 35 people on our staff and they are busier than ever. Maybe the news started people thinking about hamburgers. Who knows?"

"People keep eating hamburgers, especially Texans," said Randy Thomas, assistant manager of a southeast Dallas McDonald's. "Business has been pretty steady."

"Business seems to be running about as it always does," said Joe Aue, night manager of a Kip's Big Boy in Dallas. "We sell a lot of hamburgers now. And we sold a lot then."

Aue added that if customers are talking about the bad beef story, he hasn't heard about it.

Wendy's restaurant owner Harry Avery said his customers joke with him about horsemeat, but they also continue to order hamburgers.

"Our business is doing just fine," he said. "We're selling 11,000 to 12,000 hamburgers a week. That's up 8 percent in the past few weeks. The publicity certainly didn't hurt us."

As Jack-in-the-Box's Gustafson put it: "This is Texas — and when it comes to beef, it's a forgiving and a forgetting public."

Morticians mad at cheap burials

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — At age 16, James Reveley started picking up corpses to put in the back of ambulances and hearses. Eight years later he learned to despise the funeral business that he had hoped to make a career.

But Reveley, now a practicing San Antonio dentist, remains a licensed Texas mortician, often to the dismay of other funeral directors.

It's not Reveley's dental practice that concerns traditional funeral directors, but his funerals offered at about one-third the cost of a traditional burial.

"They're not crazy about me," Reveley said. "If the other funeral directors thought I was just telling people about cremation, they'd feel safe because there's only a limited market for that. But I'm selling cheap funerals and that digs into their back pockets."

Reveley, whose funeral homes in Austin and San Antonio offer a funeral service for about \$450, said most customers choose funerals which cost about \$700.

Although Reveley's funeral home offers a "full-service" funeral, he says, "If somebody wants a big, fancy open display, with all the flowers, expensive caskets, hearses — we just tell them they might want to go somewhere else. We don't do any embalming or makeup."

"I'm not trying to badmouth funeral directors, but I'm telling people they have an alternative."

Reveley said he became disenchanted with traditional funeral services after working for several funeral homes and seeing funeral directors push expensive caskets and services onto bereaved families.

"I drove a lot of limousines to cemeteries and I kept hearing people in the back seat saying, 'This is terrible. Don't do this type of thing for me when I die.'"

Reveley said his cut-rate funeral business was slow at first. He said bereaved families were afraid about "what the neighbors would think" if they did not

have a full-scale funeral. Now Reveley's funerals are busy, mostly through referrals by friends and some advertising. He said he is considering offering his cut-rate funerals nationwide.

Reveley does not believe traditional funeral industry has been consumer oriented, especially in price disclosure, policies and sales techniques. He has testified before a House Representatives committee on the Texas Legislature about abuses by the funeral industry.

Reveley's opponents have included anonymous telephone callers with death threats and the more conventional Texas Funeral Directors Association. The TFDA says Reveley testified before the committee only to seek free publicity for himself.

Johnnie Rogers, TFDA attorney, said, "He (Reveley) tries to make everybody believe we're the bad guys and, therefore, the only place to go (for a funeral) is to him. I certainly don't question his ability and talent in knowing where to go to make hay for his own private interest."

Reveley denied he is promoting his business by fighting the funeral industry. He said he is a consumer oriented in both dental and funeral businesses.

"People just don't want to talk about funerals," Reveley said. "Funeral directors don't personify themselves as grief counselors, but they're really just trying to make a sale."

"When you buy a car, you kick the tires and start the engine. But just try to intelligently choose a casket."

Reveley has advocated that the Federal Trade Commission require telephone price disclosure of funeral services — a requirement funeral industry officials label as another intrusion by government into private business.

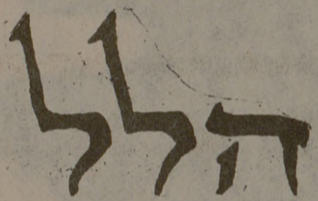
"As soon as the funeral directors throw out the words, 'funeral intervention, everybody against it,'" Reveley said. "The FTC wants is funeral directors to do what any other industry would do for their consumers."

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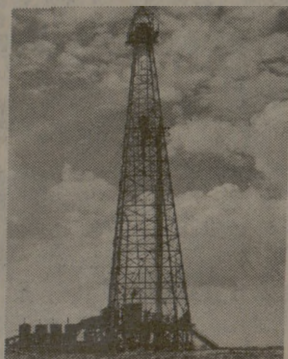
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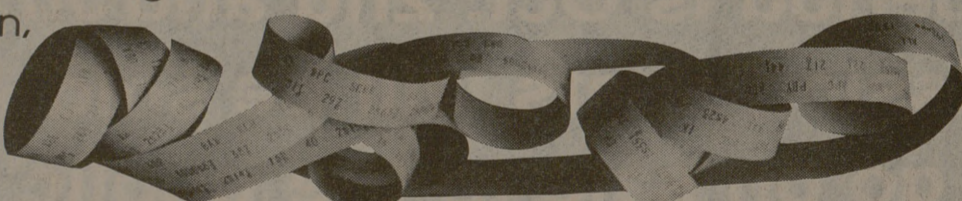
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