

John Dechert,
President, Blanco Bowling Club Café
Iconic Texas Restaurant Project - Blanco, Texas

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Interviewers: Kathryn Sutton, Nick Roland
Project Director: Elizabeth Engelhardt
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Group Members:
Nicholas Roland
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[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

[00:00:00]

Kathryn Sutton (KS): This is Kathryn Sutton, I'm sitting at the Blanco Bowling Club Cafe in Blanco, Texas with Nick Roland, a fellow interviewer and John Dechert. It is April 24th, 2012. Could you state your name?

John Dechert (JD): John L. Dechert.

KS: And John, where are you from?

JD: Blanco.

KS: What year and date where you born?

JD: April 6th, 1938.

KS: And have you always lived in Blanco, Texas?

JD: All my life.

KS: All your life. Um, could you tell me a little bit about the history of this cafe?

JD: It was, uh, open in 1948, as a private enterprise. Roland Bindseil, built and ran it, at that time.

KS: Great, and was it um, did it, was it opening um, did it open, did it um, have bowling as well as food? Has it always had that?

JD: Yes ma'am, it has always been bowling and food.

KS: And could you tell me a little bit about why this bowling alley was built?

JD: Well, Roland Binseil who opened it originally was a business man and I guess he saw an opportunity.

KS: Um, could you tell me a little bit about, um, you had mentioned earlier that another bowling alley was nearby. Could you talk a little bit about that?

JD: Well, there was a little small bowling lane about seven miles south of here, at Twin Sisters. It's a little town, probably I don't even know if it's on the map. [laughs] They just had the bowling alley and dance hall. And that bowling alley burned down in 1967.

KS: Great. Um, could you tell me a little bit about how this bowling alley and cafe became community owned.

JD: It became membership owned in 1968 after the one in Twin Sisters burnt down. The, uh, members of the Twin Sisters club, they couldn't decide if they wanted to rebuild, give the members the money or what to do with it. So they finally pooled it to divy the insurance money up among the membership and at that time C.A. Weeaks had boughten on this bowling alley and he was ready to get out and sell. So he sold it to the members, the club members, and it became the Blanco Bowling Club. He sold it for \$38,000, thirty eight year note, \$1,000 a year with three percent interest. So, it was a pretty good deal at the time.

KS: Great, great.

JD: If that was now, it sounds pretty bad.

KS: So, in 1968 this became a community owned cafe. Has this always been, is the building the same now and it was then?

JD: Is it the same? Well, it's basically same now, the outside appearance would be the same, but there have been improvements made inside.

KS: Sure, but the physical structure of the building has stood since...

JD: Right, that's right.

KS: Could you tell me a little bit about Blanco itself, I know that you are a lifelong resident. What is this town like, how many people live here, what are the main businesses around?

JD: Well, how many people live here, I think I saw a sign coming in somewhere today 1,738 maybe, and uh, it hadn't always been that many. It's a pretty much growing town. I think like in sixty eight, when this became a club we probably had 800 in Blanco. But, it's just always been a small community town.

KS: And do some of the people who eat here, and the league here, do they come from other areas nearby?

JD: They're bound to, because there's more people in here sometimes than seems like Blanco has. [laughs] You know a lot of bikers, a lot of bikers come, come eat and it just, people passing through, now and I think through different advertisements and maybe even such as this. People got the word that we that were here and if they go through Blanco they stop and, stop by and visit and eat.

KS: I had a question about the bowling. Is it open only for league members? Or is it ever open bowling? How does that work?

JD: It's basically for members and league bowling, like I said nine pin's a team game. It takes like eight or ten to play, you can't just one or two play nine pin like you would ten pin. But, its uh, it can be rented or you can make reservations to bowl if you have like eight or ten people that

want to bowl nine pin. On Fridays, when we don't have league bowling or possibly Saturdays they can bowl. If they have a group.

[00:05:34]

KS: Could you tell me a little bit about what it takes to be a member of this establishment?

JD: Well, it's pretty complicated, you have to sign a membership form, pay twelve dollars and get three people to sign the form.

KS: [laughs] How many members do you have?

JD: We have probably about 200 members but the members when they fill this application out, and fill that form when we have a general meeting once a year then they vote on new members. And, uh, normally they accept them as a group. And since 1968 when it was open, nobody hadn't been turned down membership.

KS: Great, could you talk a little bit about the people who work here and how does that work with the membership structure.

JD: I'm not sure I understand.

KS: Sure, so are the people that work here also members of the club?

JD: Well, probably most of them are but they don't have to be. They could be or could not be, it's not a requirement.

KS: But, you, is it true you yourself were a member of this club before you started working here.

JD: Yes ma'am, I was one of the charter members.

KS: Great, can, could you tell me a little bit about being a charter member and who else is a charter member and do they still frequent the cafe?

JD: Well, when they decided to buy this originally they taken membership dues from as many people as they could get that wanted to join and these people became charter members. And there was, I can't, I don't remember for sure how many they were. I was thinking maybe they were 150.

KS: Sure and do you feel like the, this establishment is kind of, is it a place where most of the people gather in Blanco because of this community owned kind of operation?

JD: Yes it is, they, it's just, it's one of the, I'd say one of the busiest places, businesses, of this nature in Blanco. I guess one reason is there's not a lot of things to do in Blanco. As far as theater or what not, it's either ball games or bowling and we have a lot of people just come watch the bowling.

KS: Great, could you tell me a little bit about how you became in charge of the cafe?

JD: Well, I was elected President in 1989, I believe that's what, in 1989 and as President of the club you're in charge of everything actually. But then probably in about '99 maybe close to 2000 they made me General Manager of the whole thing. And the reason for that is the President is a non-paying position so, they thought with as much time as I spent with all that I should be compensated for it some amount so they made me General Manager at the time.

KS: Great, so did you ever see yourself getting into the restaurant bowling alley business?

JD: Not really.

KS: I wondered if we could talk a little bit about your personal history. What did you do for most of your life before you became the manager here?

JD: I did farming ranching. Raised livestock and we at this time raise show pigs.

KS: Sure, did you show them around Texas or more nationally?

JD: No, Texas, it's mostly for 4H and FFA projects.

[00:09:53]

KS: Sure, and, so, so you, you were a rancher for some time and did your wife also, was she also on the ranch?

JD: I am sorry I didn't get—

KS: Did your wife also work on the ranch alongside you?

JD: Yes she did but she also worked at Pedernales Electric.

KS: Great. I wondered if you could tell me a little bit about what you do as a manager here. You said you did everything, what does that entail?

JD: Well, you basically as manager you see that everything is running the way it should. Bowling leagues, when new leagues, have organized new leagues and see that they are run properly and just see that everything is up and working.

KS: Sure, and you also manage the staff here I'm guessing?

JD: The what?

KS: You manage the staff here as well?

JD: I am sorry, I didn't—

KS: The workers here, did you, are you the, you know the—

JD: We have other management, like Virgie is the manager in day time and Sandy who's waitress tonight is manager in the evenings.

KS: And how many people work here?

JD: I think on the payroll it's, uh, I'm going to say roughly twenty-two.

KS: Huh, that's a lot of people. And are those mostly servers or waitress or?

JD: Well, it's waitresses, servers and cooks and, uh, we're open like 6 am to 10 pm so it's double staff. They have two shifts.

KS: Is there a certain kind of person that works here? Are they usually from Blanco, do they have a certain kind of attitude here that you can talk about?

JD: Well, they are all, I'd say all, basically most of them are from Blanco. And I don't know, I guess the attitude depends on what day it is. [laughs]

KS: [laughs] I was wondering about the gender breakdown of your workers. Are they mostly women, mostly men is it kind of in the middle?

JD: I'd say mostly woman now, I'd say it's kinda mix, but like the wait staff is mostly women. And I'd say the cook staff is half and half. A few more men in cook staff.

KS: Sure. I guess by the same token could you describe most of your customers? Are they mostly from Blanco? What kind of the people usually come into the club?

JD: Well, it just seems to me like it's all kinds. We have a lot of bikers come through and they, they come weekends mostly and just the general - I'd say just general public, it's all types of people come in.

KS: And Nick and I were noticing, that out in the entryway that there are a lot of postings for community things. Do you feel like this kind of serves as a place where people from the community come together?

JD: I think so, they have a lot of private meeting, they meet here to discuss business deals or sports deals or whatever kind of deals.

KS: And you think it has been that way since it has opened.

JD: Pretty much since it was a club maybe not so much since it was opened you know when it was a private enterprise, I think it was pretty much just a business place, a eating place. But I

think since it became a club that, uh, in other words people, people who are members and if they've got some type of meeting to do they don't hesitate to come here and do it. They're coming, basically coming to their own place for the meeting.

Nick Roland (NR): And John, how big is the membership of the club itself?

JD: I am going to say roughly 200 members at this time.

KS: And do the members typically have a certain kind of occupation? Is it people from all ways of life?

JD: Every, every bit of it, I mean it's not any certain type of any kind, the whole, basically the general population of Blanco, just a whole lot of them are members.

KS: Great.

JD: A lot of them out of Blanco you know.

[00:15:01]

KS: I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about the bowlers and the league, what they're like, are they, a rowdy bunch [laugh] I was wondering if you could just describe the leagues.

JD: Well, I am not saying that they don't get a little rowdy at times, but they come to have a good time and some of them, a lot of them don't care if they win or lose, that's just their night out.
But, they're basically well behaved.

KS: And do a lot of people on the league, have they been on the league for a long time?

JD: Oh yes, a lot of them have, uh, not that many anymore, but a lot of them have bowled since it became a club in the '60s.

KS: So we were looking at the wall and we saw some awards. So, does each season does a league win the championship, or how does that kind of work?

JD: We have, four teams in the league make a roll off or bowl off, or however you want to call it and then the winner of that is league champion.

KS: Great, and does that happen every year or how often does that happen?

JD: Well, it happens every league, most leagues probably run around twenty weeks. And when league's over, we start over the following, well we have one week in between for roll offs and start the following week with new leagues.

KS: So, do the leagues, is it typically, does one league of people, are they usually together, do they switch around members of their own league or how does it work?

JD: It is both ways, some of them like to pretty much stay together and some of them like to switch off and bowl with different groups. If you win a league that same team can't re-enter in the next league, they have to bust up and start over as a different group.

KS: I was wondering if there is an average age of the people on the league?

JD: An average age? Gosh, I guess the youngest is about twenty and the oldest ones are in their seventies. So what would be average, I'd say in the forties, fifties would probably be average.

NR: And since you have been involved in the club here for a long time, how did you get first get into bowling? Was it just kind of a thing that has always been around the community or did you kind of get in to it through your family? Were they big into bowling, or how did that work?

JD: No my family wasn't big into bowling, but I started out as a pin setter and of course every time after we had a little break or little spare time in the evening when we were through. Roland Bental, who was running the club at the time, would let us bowl so we started out at a pretty young age setting pins and then got into bowling and it was just something I really enjoyed. I don't think since it opened in well, '48, I was pretty young, but probably in '57 or 8 [Interviewer's note: 1958], I started bowling and I don't that I can recall, I haven't missed league since then.

KS: Are most people are they that dedicated to their league as well?

JD: I'm sorry, I didn't—

KS: Sure, are most people that dedicated to the league as well? They never miss a time?

JD: Well, a lot of them are, and a lot of them, lot of them, you know have to miss leagues for different reasons. House, business, school, you know in a small town like this there are so many school activities and a lot of times the younger couples with the children in school have to drop out a few year because it's just so much going on with school.

KS: Do you find that a lot of those people come back after, you know after having children?

JD: Oh yes, yes.

KS: I was wondering if you could talk a bit about what you've learned over the course of being the manager here or being a member even here. What you have learned about restaurant business, what you have learned about, you know, the bowling business.

JD: Well I guess you learn or have gotten have gotten experience from business in general, bowling and restaurant. I wouldn't say more so as a restaurant, you learn a whole lot. I guess

what I have learned most is dealing with people, and help especially, it's, we have a good staff but yeah it's a little different dealing with them sometimes.

[00:20:13]

KS: Do you feel that way about the customers too?

JD: Well, no, [laughs] no not really. We have a good group of customers.

KS: Could you describe a typical day at the club from opening to closing.

JD: A typical day? Well they, I think the cooks come in about 5:30 and start preparing and then the waitresses come in at 6:00 and they get ready to open at 6:30. And they have breakfast run, in the mornings and then they have a lunch run from eleven, eleven till two. And then they change shifts at, the cafe changes shifts at two o'clock and then they swap shifts for the evening shift and have a lunch run in the afternoon, the evenings then. The bowling, the bartender comes at three o'clock and she pretty well runs the bowling end of it, responsible for the pin setters and the lanes, keeping the lanes oiled and everything. Then league starts at, well about fifteen to 7:00 when they start practice and league starts at 7:00.

KS: Great, and then when do you close, how long do they play typically?

JD: Well, we close as soon as we can get the last one's out [laugh] after bowling but, normally its ten thirty. The cafe closes at nine o'clock and the bar closes, most time after, they done bowling around ten o'clock, and most of the time around ten thirty everyone is pretty well gone. We don't have set time when we close, as long as there's customers we stay.

KS: This is back tracking a little bit, but I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about being, is it called a pin, a pin setter upper?

JD: A pin setter, yes, pin picker, pin setter, whatever. Tell you a little about it? Well, each setter is responsible for two lanes and they I guess do the same job as your automatic machines do but being nine pin, there are no automatic machines, so they keep pins set for the bowlers ready to knock down.

KS: Is it kind of a hard job to do?

JD: Well, it looks hard it is really not that hard and they make, you know it is pretty young, fairly young people and they can make forty or fifty dollars a night for three hours. [JD phone rings and he answers]

JD: Where were we at?

KS: We were talking about the pin setters, they make fifty dollars a night you were saying.

JD: Well, forty to fifty, they get so much from the club plus tips and I would say on average forty, forty five dollars.

KS: So do the league bowlers usually tip the pin setters?

JD: Yes, yes, they tip pretty well really.

KS: Great, um, I was wondering if you could tell me a little about, about how maybe the cafe has changed over the course of you being a member, you being a manager, or the president?

JD: How it has changed in what aspect?

KS: Operations, if you have made improvements to the actual building, anything like that.

JD: Well, the outside of the building is the same as it was, basically the same as it was in forty eight. The inside has changed, we had the back part was strictly bowling area in sixty eight when the club bought it. And it's been turned into a dining room also. We have as many table and chairs back there as we do up front here. An when we're, you know, like lunch runs and weekends we use that bowling part or back part as a second dining room. And we get full front and back a lot of times. And that's one of the bigger changes, and what, what really allowed us to serve a lot more customers when we changed the back into a dining area.

[00:25:30]

NR: Has the building always had air conditioning or when was that put in?

JD: It's all been put in since it was a club, probably since '89, '90, uh, we have, air conditioners for the bar part, for the, for this part, for the kitchen, that's one of the few kitchens I bet you can find that's got air conditioners. And we even have air conditioners where the pin setters work. So, we have air conditioners all over the place.

NR: But that wasn't put in 'til '89 or '90, you think?

JD: I'd say it started in uh, in uh, in the early nineties and the not all of it put in at the same time. We gradually put them all in though, throughout, I'd say by ninety five we had them pretty much all in place.

NR: So what was it like in the middle of the summer before they had AC in the building?

JD: Well back then everyone didn't have air to start with, so they had the, what do you call them, those swamp coolers and what not and I guess everyone though it was comfortable. [laughs] We didn't have 110 degrees like we did last summer [*unintelligible*] seems like. [laughs]

KS: Alright, I was wondering if you have any future plans to change any part of the cafe, any renovations, anything like that?

JD: Not that I know of at this time.

KS: And if there were plans, such as that, do the, do the members kind of vote on things of that nature. Is that kind of the managers call? How does that system work?

JD: Well, the whole thing is ran by a board of a President, Vice President, and three directors. And they have full authority on all the running and operation of the club. And we meet once a month.

KS: And so the board members are not paid, is that correct?

JD: That's correct.

KS: How often do the board members come to the cafe?

JD: How often do they come? Well, some of them come every day, some of them come once a week and bowl and it's, you know it's no set time. The Vice President is Jerry Lindeman. He, he's here nearly every day. I'm here nearly every day, uh, Sandy is also night manager, so she is here every day. And Vernon is a director and he probably, he's here probably two or three times a week and, uh, Barbara is the other director and she's here at least once a week to bowl.

KS: I was wondering if you could tell us a little about the decor of this cafe? There is lots of signs on the walls. Is there any kind of, is anyone in charge of the decor? How do they kinda come about?

JD: I [laugh] don't really know how to answer that. We try and keep most of the, like the ad signs, or like out in the foyer, outside there we try and keep most of what people want to put up, kind of like bulletin board we try and keep that out there. And the rest of it is pretty much what we put in.

KS: I see a Real Ale sign, which is a beer that is brewed in Blanco. Is that something you serve here?

JD: Is it new? Is that what you asked?

KS: Do, do you serve that beer here?

JD: Oh, yes, yes, actually we serve quite a bit that. Mostly the Fireman's Four is Blanco beer and it's catching on pretty good.

KS: Great, one thing about the decor that I can ask is lots of your table tops have advertisements, local advertisements on it, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that?

[00:29:42]

JD: The ad's on the table tops? I think, I think these ads are run for three years and then they change the tops and re-do the ads, so they put a little deal out front and if anybody wants on with an ad if they have space they will change them you know, from time to time. You know, some of them may be out of business now that started on there three years ago but they redo them every three years.

KS: Great, and they, I am assuming they pay to be on the table top?

JD: Yes, and I don't know, there is a man in charge of that, and he furnishes the table tops and changes them out and he's responsible for getting the ads, and basically he gets most of the advertisement, we get a certain percentage of advertisements, but most of that goes to him for furnishing the tops and keeping them in shape.

KS: I wondered if we could start talking about the food you serve here? What, how would you describe the food you serve here at the cafe?

JD: Well, apparently it must be pretty good because a lot of people come get it. But, I think that one of the special plates that people really like to come try are the enchiladas. They're pretty good, we are pretty famous for our cream pies, coconut cream and lemon. Chocolate, I think is the other one. It's just the, basically, we don't serve like, uh, steaks that much it's mostly like hamburger steaks, chicken fried steaks, and burgers, a lot of burgers. We've got probably the best hamburger in town, it's just general food, not just one certain type. Like, we are not a steak house in other words.

KS: Has the menu changed a lot since you have, since you have started out here in '68.

JD: Not, not that much, it's pretty basic. They have specials every day, and every Monday is chicken fried steak and every Friday is catfish and other than that it varies from, depending on the day, really, not every Tuesday is not the same. Every third Wednesday we have turkey and dressing, and I think they have like five or six choices to pick from on the sides, and they get three of them with lunch.

KS: Do you have a favorite dish to eat here?

JD: Oh, I don't know, I like the chicken fried steak and I like the hamburger steak and occasionally enchiladas. I like the food but one of my favorites isn't, and it was on the special today is the tuna casserole, uh, tuna patties, or tuna fish patties, or, they, a lot of people don't care for them I guess, but I like the tuna I guess.

KS: Do you have any insight on where lots of your ingredients come from? Do you have a particular purveyor that gives you food?

JD: We buy a lot of the ingredients from US Foods and a lot from Ben E. Keith, they are the two basic suppliers.

KS: And has that changed over the course of the years? Did you used to get food from someone else?

JD: I think many years ago, maybe in the eighties, they may have had Sysco for a while. A lot of the meat, like the hamburger meat and what steaks we do serve and that, is local here from Lester Meat Market. But other than it has been those suppliers for a long time.

KS: I was wondering if the cooks in back, do they, have they invented anything on the menu, does anyone have like a special dish that is known after them, anything like that?

JD: No, not, not really.

NR: So, uh, with the menu, um, has somebody come up with that, is somebody kind of in charge of establishing that, or has it just always kind of been the same. I mean, you said, the food here is obviously good. A lot of people stop by, so somebody must have come up with all these good recipes.

[00:35:13]

JD: I think, uh, I think at this time the way it's set up, the manager, uh, Terry, is the kitchen manager in the day time, or morning, morning to two o'clock and she pretty much comes. The menu, like I said the menu is pretty basic on Mondays and Fridays, and, uh, then they come up with the menus for the rest of the week. Or she does actually.

KS: Um, I was wondering if you think that that the food served here, how do you think it fits into Texas culture, um, if it does?

JD: How do I think it fits in Texas culture?

KS: Do you think that it reflects what Texans eat, or is it something a little different, or?

JD: Oh, I, I think so. Very much so. You know we don't have a lot of people coming through that aren't Texans.

KS: Sure, sure. I was wondering, has, so you have, you know, pies here and rolls you were talking about. Is there a specific baker that, that bakes all of this?

JD: No we bake them here. The donuts, rolls, pies, bread is all baked here.

KS: Do, um, so is it a system where you bake in the morning and then you might run out at the end of the day or how does it work?

JD: That's right, they bake the pies every, every day, every morning, and donuts. And, uh, well they bake the bread, biscuits, pies, donuts, every, every day.

NR: So have the cooks been here for, for a while? Have they been working here for a while?

JD: Yes, basically we have a, our staff stays pretty much year to year. And some of them change of course but the basic ones have been here a good while, yes.

KS: Um, do you know who, is there any employee who has been here the longest? Are there a lot of employees who have worked here for a long time?

JD: Well Virgie has been the daytime manage since '95. So I'd say she is one of the longer employees. Some of the wait staff has been here probably eighteen, twenty years. We had one retired, uh, two weeks ago that had been here probably since it opened.

KS: Great. Um, I was wondering if you could talk about, a little bit more about your customers, do you typically have, you know, families, is it groups of friends, do people come in here alone, um, what is the typical?

JD: It's all of the above. It's family, friends, some come by themselves. And you know at lunchtime a lot of the workers around town come and eat, and then of course in the evening we have more of the family type deal. But I wouldn't say it's one more so than another.

KS: And what kind of workers typically come in here?

JD: All kinds.

KS: Is that including agriculture, um—

JD: Well it's agriculture, road work, bankers, you name it.

KS: Great.

NR: Are there, here in town are there, what other restaurants are there?

JD: Let me see. I think, uh, at this time we have one there at the bank, uh, the new one we have, Uptown Blanco, is across town. We have, Joey's Pizza was across the street and they moved over on the square and they now serve Italian feed, uh, food. And we now have two or three different Mexican restaurants. But, uh, basically the one, the barbeque place right across the street closed a little over a year ago, and Sunset across the square closed this last year, so, as far as restaurants there's not that many left. Right now ours is one of the main ones. You know the rest of them have come and gone and new ones pop up but this one has been here since '48, so it's pretty stable.

[00:40:11]

KS: And, um, would you say that there used to be more restaurants around Blanco, or do they just come and go in general?

JD: Well I'd say there were more, there's still plenty but they, one will close down then another one will pop up, kind of that type of deal but I'd say probably right now there's less than there has been. We do have a Dairy Queen south of us and a Sonic. Has just, uh, Sonic has just come in about two years ago.

NR: And, uh, with this being kind of a community institution could you just talk a little bit about that and what the role is in the community, maybe with the high school and stuff like that?

JD: I'm not sure I know exactly what you—

NR: Well do, does the Bowling Club Café do anything here in the community with charity fundraiser type stuff or anything?

JD: Yes, we have, what we try to do more than anything is have the school projects, and for the young people. Uh, projects that the younger set, the children basically are doing. The chapter show at school [note: 4-H Chapter] is one of our big deals we sponsor and the youth livestock show we help with and then we help some of course with the fire department, and, but mostly it's pretty much local, local deal what we try and support involving the children.

KS: And is that something that board members or members vote upon, um, is it one of the main priorities?

JD: If any donation or if we contribute to anything if it's, if the amount is over one hundred dollars it has to be voted by the board.

KS: And so kind of along those lines, are there board rules? Is there like a board book, any kind of document about, um, things that members should do, a code of conduct, anything like that?

JD: No, not that I know of.

KS: So these rules, that, like, you know, this hundred dollar rule, that's just something that's kind of known by all members?

JD: Right. This, when I said it has to be voted on, not by the membership, by the Board of Directors, which is five, President, Vice President, and three Directors are the ones that would vote on it.

KS: In talking about these fundraisers do you have, like, is there a day at the café that is, that all the money goes to certain kind of things, are there any special events at the café throughout the years?

JD: No.

KS: So it's just money that comes into the café and it's fueled somewhere else typically.

JD: That's right.

KS: Let's see.

NR: I have a question that kind of goes back to the food aspect a little bit, but the bar, is it beer only? Or do y'all have liquor or wine? What's the selection there?

JD: Well it's beer only and like wine coolers is the only type of wine we have. Now we're thinking about, and maybe even when we renew our license the next time, trying to upgrade to a wine license where we can serve wine and certain other type of drinks.

NR: And what are the rules here in Blanco County in terms of liquor by the drink and stuff like that?

JD: What are the rules?

NR: Right, in other words if you wanted to add a full bar with liquor would you be able to or what's allowed here in Blanco County?

JD: Oh, it would be allowed, it just the, you have to upgrade your license to what you want to serve.

NR: And did this establishment always have a bar with beer and so forth?

JD: Yes, it, when it opened it opened as a – you know, a bowling lane without a bar wouldn't work.

NR: [laughs]

JD: [laughs]

KS: And are there other bars nearby or were there when you opened?

JD: The bars are kind of like restaurants, they've come and gone, but there's now, there's basically one more, one other bar in Blanco. Not Blanco County, in Blanco. And that's Riverside, down the street, but that's the only other.

[00:45:18]

KS: I wondered if you could talk a little bit about the bowling again. You said that, you know, obviously there are a lot of league players but, that are members but also do people, so do people from Blanco come just to watch bowling?

JD: Oh yes, a lot of people come watch and a lot of, a lot of even, a lot of the bowlers when they're not bowling that night come watch, see what the others are doing that night.

KS: Are people fans of a certain team? Is there kind of a competition in that regard?

JD: It's, uh, fans of teams and people that are against certain teams. Some, [laughs] some of the teams that win a lot, they have less fans than some [laughs] that don't.

KS: Um, I saw there's also a TV back there, do people come to watch sport games ever here? Is that part of the community?

JD: Well it's not really to, for people to come watch sport games the, uh, when bowling's on, a certain sports game's on that they like to watch. Not always only sports, some of them like to watch Survivor and some of them like to watch different other shows and then sometimes they argue about what are we going to show tonight. [laughs] But, whoever gets here first to the TV I guess.

KS: Great, um, and has the bartender been here for a while, is the bartender a member of the Blanco community, Blanco community?

JD: Yes, she's, uh, she's probably I'd say about three years, the present bartender.

KS: Um, do you have an estimate of how many people come into, into this café each week? How many people eat here or socialize here, do you have any idea?

JD: Oh, that'd be, that'd be pretty hard to guess. I think our capacity is about eighty people and a lot of times, especially Sundays after church it's, uh, every chair is full. But, and, during weekdays at lunch we probably have forty or fifty at a time. But, uh, and I, they, I don't know how many times that would change over, maybe three times a day, starting a little slower and ending a little slower. But at peak we probably have sixty people.

KS: And before you were talking about how a lot of bikers come into the café and, um, do you know how they know about the café? Why they stop here?

JD: I think the bikers all know about it. I guess, you know, they travel all over and it seems like they all, one of their favorite places to go is Luckenbach. And it's kind of on the way, they'll come out of San Antone, they'll come out of Austin and they'll meet here and then go on wherever they want to travel that day.

NR: Uh, is there any stories that you kind of associate with the restaurant, like funny or, uh, I don't know, eventful things that have happened here over the course of time?

KS: Uh, seeing as it's so integral to the Blanco community it sounds like, has anything, you know, happened here?

JD: Well we had, uh, I'm not sure exactly what you want but we did have a movie that was part of it shot here at one time, uh, Flesh and Bone. The, uh, right in the beginning of that movie they shot some of those scenes here.

NR: Did any celebrities or politicians or people like that ever come through?

JD: Well yes, uh, Lyle Lovett used to come with his, I think he was in one of the bike riding groups in, or they would come up sometimes and he used to come quite often in here. I can't recall Willie [Interviewer's note: Willie Nelson] ever came by. [laughs]

KS: Um, I wonder, because we are American history students, and we were wondering if, you know, anything eventful has happened in the town like protests, anything like that. Has the café been involved in any, anything like that?

JD: No ma'am.

[00:49:58]

KS: Um, let's see. Yeah I, we have one question. If you were to kind of, if you were to, you know, write a newspaper article about this café, what do you think would be the concentration of the article? Would it be the food, the people they serve, what do you think is kind of the key things that people would take away from a visit here?

JD: Well I'm not a very good writer to start with, so I don't guess I'd write a newspaper article. But I don't really know exactly what you're wanting—

NR: What would you want people to know about this place or the impression that they might take from coming here?

JD: Well I, I think it's a nice friendly place and the food is good. It basically any, pretty much any type of food is good. Like say if you like pies or donuts they're always a good draw. So I think it's a, I think it's a good family place. And you can bring family and small children as well and not worry about the crowd being rowdy or any such as that. I think it's just a good place to come as a family.

NR: Um, I guess just kind of going back to the customers, do you ever see a change as the seasons go by, do you get more let's say, you know, hunters in the fall and folks coming out to the river in the, does that kind of pattern change?

JD: Well yeah, we do have a lot of hunters come in in the fall, that changes. Seems like the bluebonnets bring a lot of people through. It's kind of one of the centrally located in bluebonnetville or whatever you call it. We're just past that and it seems like we get a lot of traffic from those. And other than that it's just, I don't really know, I want to know it myself what brings them all sometimes. You know, when we started in '68 when it became a club if there were half a dozen strangers in town you kind of wanted to know who they were and now it seems like most of them are strangers. [laughs] It just, a lot of people passing through.

KS: But at the same time do you feel like you have a customer base in Blanco that is here a lot?

JD: Oh yes, yes, we do. And especially like after the ball games, we have so many Little League games it's Little League this, Little League that, Little League [laughs] baseball, football, soccer,

whatever. But a lot of them come, you see a lot of them come, with the little ones with their uniforms on and that's a pretty good draw for us.

NR: Do any of the high school teams come eat here?

JD: We have had different ones, the one from Dripping Springs used to come pretty regular when they, when they were between Dripping Springs and Blanco they would eat here. And a lot of the, when they have the FFA contests that's always a big day for us because they have like a area, area contest here where they may have kids from fourteen, fifteen different schools. And there's a lot of them come here and eat when they have those events.

KS: Sure, um, we were out looking at the bowling alley and there are lockers. And I was wondering if people typically bring their own shoes, do bring their own balls, um, what are the leaguers kind of like?

JD: The, the lockers are, like you keep your ball and shoes there in the lockers. Most of the ones that bowl regular bowl in, you know a lot of bowlers bowl in other leagues elsewhere, ten pin leagues, but they would take their ball and shoes with them but the biggest majority of them leave them here. And that's what the lockers are for.

KS: And do bowlers eat while they're bowling, how does that work? Do they eat before, do they eat after, do they drink while they're bowling?

JD: [laughs] They eat before their bowling, and during their bowling, not too many eat after their bowling because the café closes at nine o'clock and they generally don't get through bowling until 9:30 or so. [laughs] A lot of them drink while they're bowling, yes.

KS: Um, and you were saying, so bowling is open, is it, what days, what days, and is, are all the leaguers there every night?

JD: Every team bowls one night a week and like, uh, presently we have twenty teams. And you may not bowl the same night every week, but you may bowl Monday this week and Wednesday next week and Thursday the next week but they bowl one night a week for a team.

KS: Alright, well I think that might end our interview, thanks so much for speaking to us. Is there anything, um, when we contacted you that you thought, you know, you might talk about that you haven't? Anything that, you know, you would want us to take away as a visitor again to take away from this café or anything at all?

JD: I don't know, I think we've covered it pretty well.

KS: Okay great, well thank you so much for speaking to us.

JD: I'm sorry, I didn't hear, I didn't hear the last—

KS: Oh, just thank you, thank you very much.

JD: Oh yes, yes, I enjoyed it.

[END INTERVIEW]

[00:56:25]