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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. --When it came time to close down the old Cozy Dog Drive-In late last month, the restaurant went away quietly. Its bark was never as good as its bite.

Soon the restaurant will be in a new building doing what it's been doing since 1949, serving battered deep-fried hot dogs on a stick - a version of the corn dog known as the "cozy dog" - on Old Route 66 south of downtown Springfield. Route 66 historians regard the Cozy Dog as the road's original fast food.

The Cozy Dog Drive-In was razed June 25, to be replaced by a Walgreens drugstore. A new Cozy Dog restaurant is being built where the A. Lincoln Motel used to stand, directly north of the original location. It is scheduled to open in July.

"We spent our whole life here," said Cozy Dog owner Buz Waldmire, 48, sitting in the old dining room as pickle barrels caught water from a leaky ceiling. "I remember standing on a metal milk crate frying hamburgers as a kid. I met my wife here. It's sad to see the old place go.

"We never wanted to move, but we never owned the whole lot. The developer bought this acre of property and the acre of property the motel sat on. It was either make a deal and move to a new building or close for good."

Buz's late father, Edwin Waldmire Jr., became the father of the Cozy Dog while serving in the Army Air Corps.

"My dad stopped at a roadside restaurant in Amarillo, Texas," Buz said. "They had corn dogs on the menu, but it took 20 minutes to get one because they baked them in an oven. When he got back to his air base, he called his college roommate in Galesburg, Ill., whose father owned a bakery. He asked, 'Can you mix me up some batter that will stick to the side of a hot dog while we fry it in oil?' It worked."

Edwin Waldmire called his creation "Crusty Curs" and began selling them on weekends along Old Route 66 in Texas and Oklahoma. When he was discharged and returned to Springfield in 1946, his wife Ginny didn't think much of the name.

She questioned the appetizing lure of a Crusty Cur and suggested the name "Snuggle Puppies." He wondered who would eat something called a Snuggle Puppy. They compromised on a Cozy Dog. Ginny Waldmire designed a logo of two hot dogs in a blissful embrace, which is still used today.

The elder Waldmire registered his invention as an "inbuilt hot dog" with the Illinois secretary of state. Waldmire was a terminal tinkerer. His inventions such as an

electric cozy dog fryer and wood-handled batter-dipping gadgets are being moved to the new restaurant as part of a Cozy Dog; Route 66 museum.

The cozy dog made its official debut 50 years ago at the 1946 Illinois State Fair. Three years later, Edwin Waldmire bought half interest in a single parcel with the owner of an adjacent Dairy Queen. With the help of family and friends and \$50,000 that they scraped together, Waldmire built the hardboard-siding restaurant from scratch under the shade of a sycamore tree, which since has toppled in a tornado.

At one time, there were three Cozy Dog restaurants in Springfield.

Tom Teague is past president of the Route 66 Association of Illinois and author of the book " Searching for 66." "A lot of people are saying it's a damn shame the old place has gone down," said Teague, a Springfield resident. "But that's very much a character of 66. The road was not of ply and amber. It was always about change and progress."

Buz Waldmire said: "When the interstate went around the east side of Springfield in the latter part of the '60s, night business died. . . . But before that happened, the old road in front was the only thoroughfare between Chicago and St. Louis. You had to go by my dad's place."

Ed Waldmire took some big stands for someone who spent so much time with weenies. He was a member of the World Federalists, an organization that strived for world peace through world law. And during Cozy Dog's early years, Waldmire ignored the segregated seating rules generally applied in Springfield restaurants.

"The Dairy Queen manager would hang a sign that said, 'We Reserve the Right to Seat Our Customers,' " Waldmire recalled. "My dad would always tear the sign down. Blacks were always served here."

One of Cozy Dog's final visitors was comic Flip Wilson, who was touring Route 66 on a recent Sunday afternoon with 300 Harley-Davidson motorcycle riders. The restaurant was closed. Waldmire, his wife and some friends had begun moving 40-year-old fryer parts and cooking equipment out of the basement. Wilson still took in the roadhouse ambiance and autographed the "Liar's Table," where Cozy Dog regulars tell tall tales on a daily basis.

Waldmire smiled and looked down at the Liar's Table. "So he said, 'If you're closed today and I can't get a Cozy Dog, I'll write: 'Cozy Dogs are great. I had 12 of them!' And then he was gone."

The truth is that in 1974 Buz met his wife at the Cozy Dog. Sue was a 16-year-old Springfield native, working part time in the restaurant's kitchen. They were married in 1975 and have six children, ranging in age from 2 to 24. In 1978, Edwin Waldmire sold the Cozy Dog to Buz, who now hopes that one of his sons will want

to inherit the business.

"Closing is kind of like when our parents pass on," said Waldmire, with a broken rotary wall phone in the background. "Nobody lives forever. . . . But now we'll have a new building and maybe it will last for the next 50 years."

On the outside walkway, Waldmire's brother Bob carefully removed a 24-foot coast-to-coast wooden map of Route 66. It was so quiet, you could hear passing trucks from the distant interstate.