

DOUMAR'S

ICE CREAM BARBECUE



May 26, 2011--

NORFOLK, Va.--It is a scoop of an unseasonably warm spring day in Norfolk, Va. Young people are boating on the Elizabeth River. Old timers speak of native son Gene Vincent and there is a *be-bop-a-lula* in their stroll down Granby Street. The middle-aged dude at the metal record store gets crabby when you ask about calypso vinyl.

This is no time for such sweet nothings.
Something is always sweet at Doumar's, 1919 Monticello Ave.

Doumar's is a drive-in diner that serves North Carolina style barbecue, shakes and fresh-squeezed limeades.

But it is best known for creating the waffle cone at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. Abe Doumar was on the road dressed in an Arab robe and selling souvenir Jordan River Water paperweights to fair goers.

One night he saw an ice cream vendor who was shutting down because he ran out of dishes for his ice cream. At the time, ice cream was served on dishes or paper for customers on the take-away.

Another man nearby was selling thin wafers made from a charcoal-heated waffle iron. This guy cooled them and added whip cream for garnish. The resourceful Abe Doumar rolled one of the wafers into a cone shape. He put the ice cream on top and suggested the vendors combine their operations.

Abe carried a lot of weight.
And the ice cream cone was born.

Abe's nephew Albert still makes cones at the diner.
Albert is easily recognized by his orange "Big Al" baseball cap and bow tie. He owns nearly 100 bow ties. Albert is 89 years old.

He is the son of Abe's brother George. The brothers were born in Syria. In 1999 Doumar's received a James Beard Foundation Award in the "America's Classics" category for family-owned restaurants.

"My uncle sold them for a dime I guess," Al says, slightly out of breath while standing in front of the world's first cone machine. Then he gets Rube Goldberg on me. Al explains, "He could only make 60 cones an hour. He took a waffle iron machine to a machinist in Hoboken, New Jersey. They put four of the waffle irons together, so while three were cooking he could make cones on the other one. He could make 180 an hour. He took this machine to Coney Island in 1905 and opened his first stand with three partners."





This is the
**WORLD'S FIRST
CONE MACHINE**
STILL IN USE TODAY, IT WAS USED IN 1905 AT
CONEY ISLAND N.Y. BY **ABE DOUMAR**, INVENTOR
OF THE ICE CREAM CONE & THIS MACHINE

Abe also hit America's festival circuit, selling his newfangled ice cream cones at wild west shows, summer resorts and state fairs. Abe purchased ice cream when he arrived in each location.

"He came to Norfolk to go to the Jamestown Exposition which is being held right there where it is today, you know, the Naval Base," Al says as if I have been in Norfolk all my life.

That's why this place is so sweet.

George Doumar opened his first store in 1934 on the present location. He added sandwiches and curb service so he could be open year round.

The current building went up in 1949. Curb service waitresses bring you cheeseburgers (with cheese on both sides), the Egg-O-Doumar (fried ham and egg with cheese on a roll), barbecue, and of course, ice cream cones.

Doumar's serves six flavors of custom made ice cream: vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, butter pecan, lime sherbet and orange sherbet (\$2 one scoop, \$3.20 for a big cone with two scoops). "We only have six so you can remember it!," Al says. "You can't remember it if you have 16. We had those from the beginning." Vanilla is the best seller.

"An ice cream cone makes ice cream taste better," he says. "These cones are all natural." They are made by hand with flour, sugar, vanilla and water. Doumar's does not use dairy products.

Al still makes 200 cones between 9:30 and 11 a.m every day. "We make up 600 a day during the spring," he says. "We put them in glass jars and sell them. They won't get stale as long as you keep the top on the jar."

Also check out the "Ringo" or Strawberry Willy vanilla ice cream sundae made with crushed cone chips and topped with whip cream and a cherry.

The Doumar's menu points out, *"The Sundae was developed in Evanston, Illinois after that community legislated against the evil 'Sunday Soda Menace.' It contained no soda water and was there fore no threat to the morale of the community."*

Be sure to get someone to show you the ample scrapbook the family keeps near the front door. There's lots of Americana, such a photo when Al appeared on a 1972 airing of the popular "To Tell The Truth" quiz show. He tried to stump the panel of Bill Cullen (who was married to Betty White) Peggy Cass, Garry Moore, Alan Alda and others as the creator of the ice cream cone. Al told the television nation that the all-times sales record was 22,600 cones in one day.

Al tells me, "The Virginia Electric and Power Company had a party around 1926. That included people from Norfolk, Richmond and Newport News. There were 40,000 people who came to our seven stands (at the since-razed Norfolk based) Ocean View Amusement Park. The Vice President of the company paid for all the



Doumar's
BARBECUE
CORN SERVICE



ice cream cones for everyone that came."

The generous vibe remains at Doumar's. You'll get a charge out of it.