COMPLEX CITY

Diners in San Diego

Gage   & Ahsaki

Diners are an underrepresented part of San Diego history. They bring back a nostalgic time of fresh, handmade comfort foods, malts, swing-music, and an era of vintage cars and well-dressed people sitting down and taking a moment from their fast paced lives. In the midst of skyscrapers, electric cars, and drive-thru restaurants, these remnants from our past still do exist, yet there are few in number. During the rise of Denny's and corporate-fast food restaurants, the number of vintage diners in San Diego became underdogs in the food market.

Websters Dictionary defines a diner as a "a restaurant usually resembling a dining car in shape." Over the decades, this definition has expanded into a new meaning. For the purpose of having a clear definition to use for mapping, a diner is defined by its appearance and/or most importantly the food. Linda Cook, born in 1956, says, "[what] a diner would [have is] classic, American food. Basically what would've been on the menu, say in the fifties and sixties I would consider a diner. Like today, the Corvette Diner, which is kind of from the fifties, that's pretty typical. The styling of it, where they would have a soda fountain in the restaurant. Basically, good ol' American cuisine, hamburgers, and sandwiches and chili. Always made right there, it wasn't like fast food is these days where it's all shipped in and pre-packaged." Similar to the way the definition of diners has metamorphasized, the creation of diners began in a different way as well.

Walter Scott of Providence, Rhode Island is credited as the one who inspired the birth of diners. He sold food from a horse drawn express wagon in 1872 which was a big hit. Companies began to manufacture lunch wagons which led to more people eventually purchasing street cars and transforming them into restaurants. As competitors to Walter Scott's booming business began to rise, prices

began to change as well. Other lunch wagons began selling sandwiches, but also included a slice of onion, mustard, and/or ketchup for free. These extra items began to affect Scott's business as he struggled to make profit. "In the last few years downtown I lost several dollars a week in free onions, wasted mustard and excess cat-sup...With eggs and everything else high, there wasn't much profit in a sandwich at five cents, especially if you added a piece of onion... " (Gutman 16). At the Hamburger Spot which used to exist in San Diego on 617 Broadway during the 1940, hamburgers were sold for ten cents. At a Jack-in-the-Box today, a similar burger can be purchased for approximately four dollars. From comparing the prices of food from different eras, it shows how wages have drastically changed from a time of quality, cheap food, to now a time of fatty, processed burger and fries.

The typical diner menu mainly consists of fried and grilled food. A classic diner breakfast menu consists of bacon, eggs, omelets, sausage, pancakes, and waffles. Diners serve food such as hot-dogs, hamburgers, and chicken. The oldest diner in San Diego is the 1938 Chicken Pie Shop in North Park, founded by George Whitehead who passed away in 2001. For 6 dollars at the Chicken Pie Shop, one can devour a full meal consisting of chicken pie, bread roll, coleslaw, and a pie for dessert.

In San Diego, only two diners which opened before the 1950s still exist. Rudfords and the Chicken Pie shop. Studio Diner currently holds the position of Best Diner for San Diego's A-List, with Ruby's Diner of Mission Valley in 2nd place, Chicken Pie Diner in Poway in 3rd place and the Chicken Pie Shop in 4th place. There are also plenty of diners which have retired like Mom's Diner, Freidhots which was once located across from Lindengberg Field, Len's Diner, and the Hamburger Spot, but due to limited information, the locations of these diners were difficult to map and pin to a date. "In the fifties and the seventies there were a lot more, but have been put out by fast food" (Linda Cook). With the rise of fast-food restaurants, this soon became a preference for those on the go, and as classic diners began to dwindle, it was Denny's who began to expand and conquer.

Denny's Diner was founded in 1953 in Lakewood, California. Its original name was Danny's Donuts. Danny's Donuts was founded by Richard Jezak and Harold Butler. The restaurant was renamed Denny's in 1959, after it had expanded to twenty different locations. By 1981, Denny's had expanded to over 1,000 locations. There was at least one Denny's in every state in the US. Today, Denny's now has over 1,650 locations and has expanded outside the country. The restaurant chain has expanded to countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and many countries in South America. Denny's didn't adopt the classic diner look until May 1997. The first Denny's that adopted this look opened in Fort Myers, Florida. Today, 38 Denny's Diners in the United Sates have the classic 50's diner look.

Although Denny's may have the look, and the food, Linda does not define it as a diner. "I call it more of a family styled restaurant chain. To me, it doesn't really have diner atmosphere, though it does have some of the similar menu items. I don't typically think of a diner as a franchised type restaurant, it's usually a one off family owned and operated business" (Linda Cook). They may not offer the authentic diner feel, but with the famous name, it leaves authentic diners in the dust.

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The San Diego Zoo has changed, grown, and improved a tremendous amount from its opening in 1916. It now has a wide and vast variety of animals and exhibits. We were fascinated with the improvement of the animal's living spaces and surprised at how many lives were saved by the zoo. When we first started researching information on the zoo we were astounded by the fact that the animals in the zoo are rescues.
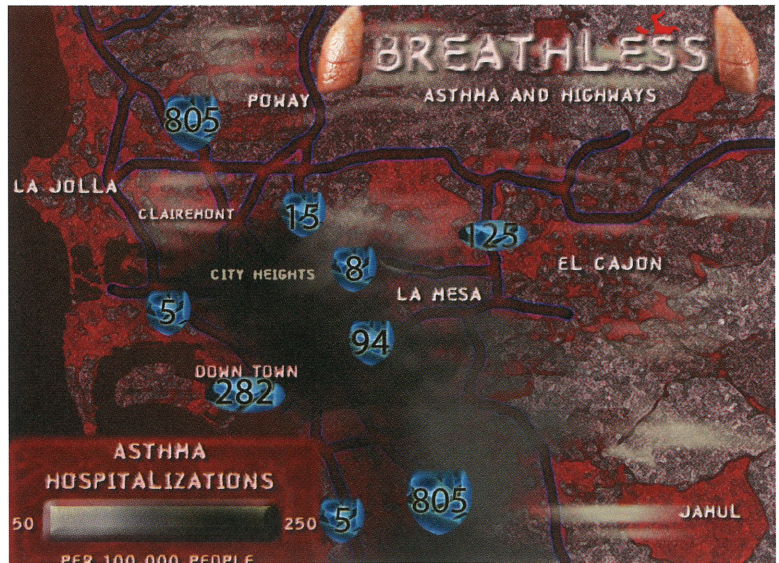
Many of these rescues have been breed within the zoo environment; and consequently, they can't be released into their natural habitat. The San Diego Zoo has created programs and researched changing that. We wanted to further research the topic so we looked at changes in different exhibits and how many endangered species have been released back into the wild or have reproduced. We hope to learn as much as possible about the zoo and its improvements and to share this information with the public.
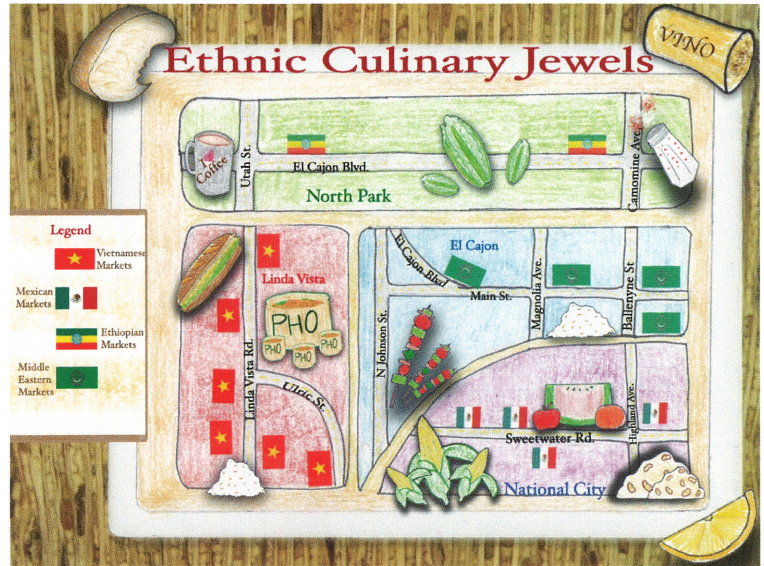
Jolena   & Maira

Placement of certain structures in a city is vital to its ability to function. After examining information regarding asthma and heart disease one can look at the locations which have the highest prevalence rates and see a correlation between highway placement and prevalence in asthma and heart disease rates. We researched information from the San Diego Health Department and found a definitive correlation between income in relation to freeway placement and rates of asthma and heart disease.

Jeffrey   & Antonio

The name of our project is the taste of San Diego (Ethnic Culinary Jewels). What we are doing is mapping the cluster of Ethiopian, Mexican, Vietnamese, and Middle Eastern markets. We are picking areas where the markets of the corresponding countries are located; Ethiopia: North Park, Middle East: El Cajon, Vietnamese: Linda Vista, Mexico: National City. The interviews we conducted contained information about the markets, and the countries food, the uniqueness of them, as well as their relationship to their countries.

Milan   & Selam

This paper will illuminate that for less than the cost of spending one night in a downtown hotel in San Diego one could feed, shelter, and provide medical attention for a homeless person for one night. Included in this paper is a breakdown of the homeless population, history of one of the largest homeless organizations in San Diego, and information about one of the most expensive hotels in downtown San Diego.

Khadijah   & Shyana