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Fall 2016

Jeremiah Cline

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KENYON COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Stories of Knox County

Jeremiah Cline
Interviewed by
Maria Brescia-Weiler and Sarah Aguilar
On
Fall 2016

Kenyon College

Oral History Project
Stories of Knox County

Interviewee: Jeremiah Cline

Interviewer: Maria Brescia-Weiler and Sarah Aguilar

Fall 2016

Jeremiah Cline: ...since 1976, and then we opened, a like a sister store in Ontario, which is basically just more or less down the road, a few miles away from the original store, and it did well, they were on opposite ends of town so it's pretty good, but we also as a company, we own Southside Diner, and we also own _____ Restaurant, which is, we kinda got into, like, preserving restaurant legacies here, in central Ohio, because that's kind of, like Watts has been open for a hundred and four years. And then we, you know, the Athens in Mansfield was originally owned by a Greek couple that, you know they were getting older and decided to sell, and so but they've been, the legacy is there for them, so they were happy to know that, you know, their traditions and recipes are gonna live on.

Sarah Aguilar: How long has Southside been here, do you know?

JC: I wanna say '98 was when they opened.

Maria Brescia-Weiler: How long have you owned it?

JC: It opened under us. It used to be, like, another restaurant, and then it, you know, they kind of, we actually, you know where La Paloma is? Downtown, La Paloma, the Mexican place? That was the owners' currently, they, that restaurant actually was a Greek owned restaurant for a long time. And they owned the building that the restaurant was in, they were good friends, and then when they were lookin' to sell, cause they're a, you know, older Greek couple as well, that was like the first entry into owning restaurants. Like, it was called the Ohio Restaurant, and through those Greek couple they met the Greek owners of the Athens restaurant, and they ate their food and they're like, yeah, we gotta, you know, definitely, they were lookin' to sell too so, it just kinda worked out.

MBW: So are there a lot of Greek people around here?

JC: There used to be. Like downtown, actually this restaurant was Greek owned for fifty years. There was a family that owned it, it was called the High Restaurant, and they actually, when they were doing the sidewalks, this summer before, you know, college came back, they had this all tore up, there was a pit here and they found like a sub-base and they had a partition up, and they actually found the original porcelain steel and neon sign. The thing was like sixteen feet long and

used to hang on the building, and it just got thrown in the basement and then boarded up and no one's seen for...

SA: This is for the, what was it called? The high...

JC: The High Restaurant.

SA: The High Restaurant. Okay.

JC: That's right. And it was Greek owned then, it was the Rizzos, they owned this restaurant and it continued, and, but you know, I've had people come in, you know, older folks, and they're like, I met my husband in this restaurant, I moved to town, you know, the lady that she was living with, they had like a boarding room, she's like, Nick, who owned the restaurant lived next door, and she's like well maybe he'll, you know, I'll talk to him. And she got a job here, she was working here for two days, her husband came in the door and she said he came the door, brought him a glass of water, and then they were married for fifty years. So, and then, but she came in here after he passed away, and we kinda heard the story, so there's been a lot of, I mean, this place has been a restaurant for, you know, since the forties really, as far back as anyone can remember, it's always been a restaurant. And it's been Greek-owned, like, you know, immigrant Greek owned, more often, you know, more years than not.

MBW: That's cool. Are you Greek?

JC: I'm not Greek, no. I say I'm Greek by cultural adoption, just because you kinda gotta embrace it to cook it, and sell the food like that really.

MBW: So where do the recipes come from?

JC: A lot of the recipes are actually, like the original owners are called, actually you can get the spelling right here (gesturing to menu) the **Gesauruses (sp?)**, Timmy and Angie. So a lot of the stuff is their family, like the baklava, you know, the big thing is our tzatziki sauce, that's been a family recipe for a long time. And only the current owner knows how to make it. We can do the prep for him but there's a process to actually making it come together that he's one of the only people, he makes it for all the restaurants actually, so he travels around. But, you know, a lot of it, you know like the rice pudding, things like that, it's all like Angie's recipes or family recipes we came across from them. And then before we opened, like the night before we opened, we had a Greek Orthodox priest come in, we did a blessing and then we cooked all the food, and then Timmy, of course it was like a buffet for everybody to enjoy it but, but they went through and were like, "Ehh, more sugar, less milk, blah blah blah," you know, kind of making adjustments to how we prepare the food, and they still come in. They actually, this is kinda like, cause there

used to be a large Greek community in Mount Vernon, like most of Main Street it seemed like there was, like, you know, work with live above quarters, and so the families ran haberdasheries, they ran restaurants, things like that, and, you know, drycleaners, and they would live above the restaurants or the businesses and then work the business during the day, whatever, go home and there was, I don't know if there was a Greek church here, but I know that a lot of this community was tied to the Greek church in Mansfield. So, but, this community as the children, you know, the immigrant families, they worked hard, they sent their kids to school, and then, you know, it's kinda sad that some of the traditions die a little bit, so that instead of helping the family business they went on to do their own thing, which is great, but you know, kind of like, those little businesses, they closed, they moved on, things like that. They've been replaced, but it's like at that time there was a very large community. There was actually, there was four or five Greek restaurants, not so much Greek restaurants, but just Greek owned businesses, and the people still talk about it. They come in here and sometimes I don't get anything done because people wanna talk to me about everything, you know, that they had other places, like, "Do you know who did the Greek salad from **Angelie's (sp?)** ? Do you know remember the **Cozy Inn (?)**, do you remember"...It's like, these are places that were still around when I was a kid, but they just kind of went by the wayside, kind of like the Ohio Restaurant, I remember eating breakfast there...but as now, you know, as the families started to die off, they kind of need to go to Mansfield or go to Columbus to be with their extended families, so as we opened this restaurant, we've actually become kind of like a meeting place for, you know, both families or groups of families that come and meet here. So like, you know, they'll make an arrangement, a group from Mansfield and a group from Columbus, to come here, to have a meal and things like that, so it kind of works out. You know, like Easter they bring in, they do lambs on a spit for Easter, things like that, for Greek Easter, which is like a different time frame than Christian Easter. But there'll be, you know, like six or seven lambs butchered, and you know, I tell the servers, "When you open the door, it's gonna be a little crazy, there's animals in the cooler." And then the families'll pick em up, come from the different areas and pick em up and for their Easter dinners and stuff.

SA: So you mentioned that the children, like, you know they had all these family owned businesses, Greek owned family business, and then the children would leave. Do you think that's why there's so much, like the population, the Greek immigrant population is so much less?

JC: Yeah, well, they just kinda moved around, they intermarried. They, when they came here, you know, it usually was like the father generally would come first, you know. And then he would come and he would establish himself, he'd get a business, whatever, you know, they tend to cook, that was a big thing, Greek owned restaurants. Or it could be drycleaners, it could be just workin for another family, until they get a nice dig and they send for the family, they get set up. So then that family, you have two immigrant parents, and then, you know, here, of course, if you're like in New York or Boston or some place where there's a larger community, you can intermarry and it would be fine. But, you know, some place here if they have eight kids, there's

not gonna be a bride or a groom for eight different kids. So then you start to have the intermarrying and things like that, so, you know, they go on to be--well, the big thing was that they improved themselves, they go on to be doctors and lawyers and things like that, and move on. But that's mainly what kinda happened was they just kinda got Americanized, kinda in the melting pot, so to speak.

MBW: Around what time frame was it when there were so many Greek owned restaurants?

JC: The fifties and sixties, generally. Post World War II was when a lot of the immigration from that area happened. You know, they were present here, and more East coast, things like that. Sometimes a family might land on the East coast, work for a few years, and then move inland looking for cheaper places that were more familiar, because all the places where they would grow, they would have family gardens at home, they're growing their tomatoes, they're growing different things like that, and then they would travel, like, Timmy, he would go to Greece once a year. He would pick fifteen thousand grape leaves and pack em in oil, he would pick thousands of olives and pack them--and so to oversee that, like from you know cousins and things like that who had land, and then he would, you know, oregano, dry oregano, dried _____, which is, you know, something we use for the souvlaki, and you know, just bring all this stuff back every year. And now though, you have your import centers, like Cleveland, Chicago, there are specialty businesses that do that for him. That's kinda, you know, the specialness kinda went with that a little bit. So when you're not doing that you kind of have a disconnect from that homeland, too, so then you start to see that as well.

MBW: So, if you're not Greek, how did you get so involved in the Greek community? Just from the restaurants?

JC: Just from, well, being in the restaurants, and that's the thing though, like in Mansfield there is an actual Greek community, there's even Greek immigrants that work in our stores up there. So you go up there and interact, you know, it's more around the churches where the communities kinda form around, you know a lot of the socialization. And then we work with like the Mansfield church to do like their Greekfest, and things like that. We do, you know, meat and things like that for them. But a lot of it's just wanting to understand the culture and not just be like, "Well we got gyros, you know, they're good!" But like understanding what went into these dishes, you know, reading recipes, things like that and learning what eating Greek is about.

MBW: So do you live around here?

JC: Yeah, I'm located in Mount Vernon.

MBW: Did you grow up around here?

JC: I did. I was born here, I was born at the old, the, like the Knox County Hospital building used to be a building run by the nuns from Saint Vincent's and that's where I was born. You know, so it's like I've always been a part of Mount Vernon, so I've seen these changes, I saw this restaurant change from, you know, change hands several times, and I've watched it run really downhill, and then we get it back. And I actually spoke to the guy that helped remodel the restaurant by the previous owner and then, because like when, like you can see this is what the building looked like turn of the century (gestures to photo on wall) There's some photos in the lobby back by the bathroom that, you know, it basically is still the same. Cause the original ceiling and things like that, a lot of the stuff had been covered up for, you know, dozens of years and they helped bring it back, and then the last time it was a Greek restaurant it looked like this, you know, so the restaurant came back, they're just kind of continuing that. But some of the restaurants have been torn down and things like that in my lifetime.

SA: So this before, I'm sorry I think you already said this, but this before the High Restaurant was a Greek restaurant?

JC: Up until like near the eighties, yeah, it was the same kind of like, it was more of an Americanized menu but you see a lot of the Greek, you know, you're gonna have Greek salad, you're gonna have grape leaves, things like that that they're more like specials, but you would still, they're still doing eggs and pancakes and bacon and then like some of the desserts and things would be, I wish I could find a menu.

SA: Do you remember, what was it called?

JC: Just the High Restaurant, it was the High Restaurant up until the time before we got it.

SA: Okay. And that, you said that had Greek food?

JC: Yeah that was a Greek family owned business, it was brothers that owned it, and they had, I think the older brother, he came here and started it. The younger brother came and ran it up until the '80s, when he got too old, and then some of their, that's when it first changed hands again, like to people who had worked there for a long time bought it, it was a couple, and then they ran it for ten years. So then it changed hands and it was like several, it just kind of went downhill with several different owners until we got back to it.

MBW: So you were talking about how this has been a restaurant for so long, and in our class we've been talking about how there is like a big downtown revitalization effort right now, and we were just wondering, I guess over your lifespan, since you've been here for your whole life, has the downtown changed a lot?

JC: Yeah, I mean, really because in my lifetime, you know, when I was a kid up until the late eighties there was still Sears and Woolworth's and like there was a lot of, the Buckwald Nursing Center or nursing school, whatever that is by Paragraphs down here, there was a lot of empty shops. There was a Ben Franklin's, then it went out to, basically you were looking at a dead downtown, you know just empty store fronts. People would come and rent because it was cheap but there was nothing to keep them downtown, there were restaurants that closed, so pretty much it was just like the shops were boarded up and things like that, and the only thing, there was a movie theater down here where COTC is, that used to be the movie theater, and, you know, that closed, so there really wasn't anything down here, so I watched all of that sort of slowly die and wither, and then I watched the Coshocton Avenue corridor go from being kind of sporadic to being just jam-packed, which is what it is, all the restaurants moved all the shopping moved, you know, Big Bear moved up and built the whole big plaza where K-Mart is, that was a really big thing when it happened, and Walmart came in. And really that was all trees when I was a kid. There's actually a video on YouTube, if you look up "Mount Vernon 1987," there's actually like, it must've been a big VHS recorder, they went from down by the pool, up Beech Street (?) where there was nothing, came down like where B-Dubs is on Coshocton. They turn left and it goes out that way and you can see all these wide open spaces, like the old restaurants, like where CVS is, there was diners, there was _____, there was, you know, different things that some of the buildings are still there but they've just been, like K-Mart was where like the Dollar Tree is and things like that, that used to be the K-Mart building, like they tore the whole front off.

SA: So how many years did it go from like being you know sporadic throughout the street to like what it is now?

JC: Probably in like the last five years really, most of the revitalization. Cause like I think the first big spearhead was when they did the Woodward Opera House, that was kinda like the first thing that really happened downtown. They tore down some buildings, built the big First Knox National Bank, that was kind of like, that brought jobs downtown, things like that, but as far as, like you know, it just kind of happened a little bit at a time. The COTC started getting built, some of the other buildings were torn down, new spaces were created and then, you know, it just kinda had a momentum that built over time to where a few things were happening and then over time, over the last two or three years it's really just kind of skyrocketed.

MBW: Does it feel like there's any tension--like that, the Coshocton downtown feels so different from this downtown and I was wondering, is there any feeling of tension between the businesses here and the like Walmart and Kroger and stuff over there?

JC: Not really, I mean as far as, like, Walmart's always gonna be Walmart, there are places that, if you want chicken wings you go to B-dubs if you want, whatever, I mean, it's like you're

gonna have the McDonald's and things like that like that. That stuff is more, what you have downtown is more personal, so you know it's like if you wanna go to Walmart and have someone treat you like crap, or if you want come downtown and have some that made something and they wanna sell it to you and they're gonna talk to about it and make sure that you understand what they're about. Cause what's kind of happening is you have a series of, you know, people that what they love to do, like their hobbies and things, they're trying to make a career out of it, and like you see, like with Downhome Leather has been a staple of downtown Mount Vernon for thirty years and their store is amazing, they make fantastic things. And then, the like, you know, they just slowly, they've always been there so they've kind of helped, the owners there are just kind of old hippies so they've kind of, you know, allowed like a culture there, you know, not necessarily a counter-culture per se but something like just a little more eclectic group of people, you know artisans and things like that arrive. And then you start getting down here with like the Place at the Woodward where local craftsmen, local food producers can kind of, it's like a co-op more or less where they bring their stuff to sell, and that's what they're trying to do with the Woodward, they trying to create a kitchen so like local food producers who do specialty things can have like a certified kitchen, so that they can prepare their stuff and then sell it in the store there.

SA: I think someone in our class is doing that for their project.

JC: Gotcha. So, I mean it's really, that's the thing about downtown is you don't have the Coshocton corridor merchants association, but you do have a downtown association where they're trying to get all the businesses together to understand that it's not just one business, that they want everyone involved, so it's like as one is benefitting they want it to benefit the whole downtown area. So it's like you know, we can all get together, you know, I can go down to Cathy at Flowers For You or any place else here, you know I can go talk to John across the street, he does my promotional items, things like that, you know. If I want mint jelly I go to the place at the Woodward, for lamb, things like that, so we try to keep things here in the downtown area. So you're gonna get a bit more of a personal touch, you're gonna be taken care of and be seen as an individual customer as opposed to just like, "Next!" you know, like, "We need five more aisles opened up down here!" So, it's just a little bit different.

MBW: So is there a lot of, between the businesses here, is there a lot of communication and cooperation?

JC: Yeah, and there's a lot of people, I mean, like for the First Friday events we all kinda know what's going on, you know, like I think I didn't answer your other question all the way, but really there's no faces on Coshocton Avenue to talk to, you know. If I'm walking in they don't know me anywhere on Coshocton Avenue. They go, "Who are you? Where do you work? Oh, what that restaurant? Where's that restaurant?" And I'm like, "Town square, right in the square."

But if I walk anywhere downtown, I mean, I can walk in every door, and say hi to everybody, and they all know who I am, and vice versa, you know, I know John at _____ and things like that, so we're trying to continue with that. That's what downtown was always about, cause more people would come downtown, so they're walking in, you know, you know your customers by face, you know what they like. You're like, "Hey John! You want the burger today?" "Yeah, okay." And we do deliveries, our customers are so regular that you know, it's like, "Hey Sarah, hey Eric," you know, he lives up at the apartment complex up there, but we've delivered so many times that I just put his name down and his food finds him every time. So it's like, you're not gonna get that from Marco's or Domino's or places like that.

MBW: So given that--are you involved in Southside and, what was the other one?

JC: Watts. Yeah, just inactively. I mean, there's things that, you know, like today one of the managers from Watts, I spearheaded like a t-shirt logo and we got t-shirts made because I've done t-shirts for us, so they called me and were like, do you have that logo? Send it to these people, so we all work together, of course, cause we're all the same company, it's not like, you know, but even though it's completely different as far as menus and things, it's still, you know, if I need something I call them to get an order, things like that.

MBW: Do you have any insight into like how like a Greek restaurant versus like a restaurant that's American food, like if they're received differently, or do you feel like they're equally popular?

JC: Well, I mean, here is different. If you go to the East coast, every store block there's Greek, there's Indonesian, there's Indian, there's, you know, Italian, there's American, there's a diner. So it's like, you know, you walk down the block and you see three Greek restaurants, you know, they may not all be the same but it might be Greek. So here, it's McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, so, you know, it's, "Greek food? Wait, what? What was that?" But you get a lot of people that travel too, like you know, I guess like there's this, you know, "I don't like Greek food." But it's like, "Well, have you had Greek food?" "Well, no. Well, what is it?" And basically all it is it's like the menu itself, I mean the food that we serve is basically the same food you're gonna eat at an American restaurant, but it may be plated a little bit differently, it may have a little bit different seasoning. But it's not like it's, you know, from a different planet or anything. So here we've had to work, like specifically, very hard to bring our food to people's tables. So like whereas they can go to Burger King, they know what they want, they know what a whopper is, they know whatever, and then the big thing is you look at our main staple food, which is the gyro, you know, flatbread sandwich, meat, sauce and vegetables, and it's like, "What is this?" And, you know, "How do you say it? Guy-ro, gee-ro, hero?" And they get, it's almost like an embarrassment, they don't know, like they wanna come in, but I don't know how you say it, and then...

SA: It's kind of intimidating.

JC: Right, exactly. So then we do the joke, which is, "Well it's all Greek to us." So then that kinda breaks the ice and it's just like, you know, it's just good, we're gonna sell you something good, you're gonna eat something good, you're gonna like it, however you say it. But, you know, that's why we do the First Friday events, we take our food out because they're wandering around, "Well, I'll get a gyro." And they're like, "Oh my god! How long have you guys been here?" And it's like, "Well, two years." "Okay," you know.

SA: So what are the First Friday events?

JC: Oh downtown, mainly during the summer, you know, like May to October there's like the first Friday of every month, through the Heritage Center Association, it's like the downtown group, local merchants are encouraged to come out to the street, they close the street, there's usually like a good band, they do a car show around the square and down the street. So it's like the community comes from out to downtown, and then you're encouraged to shop downtown, more or less. It kinda started as kind of a way to kind of save downtown, more or less, before it had it's renaissance, so to speak. And, like for us, we're doubly trying hard because it's like when we turn the lights on, visiting people are gonna be like, "What's that place?" Or like I'm seeing even people that have driven by here everyday, and like the High Restaurant was never even on their radar anyway, so they just drive by and then they're just like, "One day I just looked over and how long have you guys been here?" It's like, "Well, two years." "Really?" It's like, "I've driven by here everyday, I didn't know." "It's like, "How do you not know?" And so that's one thing, so then they come in and they try the food and they're like, "Well this is amazing!" And then they see, you know, everything else and they start getting like some of the stuff, you know, like feta spread, and roasted eggplant, and spinach pies, it's like, you know, it's all stuff that they're familiar with as far as what it is, but actually eating it there's not really an outlet for it here, or a place to try it. And if it is it's like, "well I like hummus at Kroger's!" You know, or "I've had it at Kroger's and I don't care for it." Then they eat ours and they're like, "Well this is completely different, it's amazing." So, you know, there's kind of like an educational aspect that what you've had, or thought you had, isn't quite the same as having it freshly made here.

SA: So do you mostly get people to try it from your employees being like, "Just try it!" Or, how do you...?

JC: Well, even our employees, they come in and they're just like, "Spanikopita? Flaming cheese?" You know, so then we encourage our staff to have like a family meal, so they can have a meal when they come in, we feed our staff, eat something from the menu, educate yourself on

textures and flavors and temperatures of food and things like that, and then in turn they can sell it to the customers. So they're enthusiastic about it because, you know, it's all amazing. So then when you're like, "I don't know what I want, do you have hamburgers?" And, we do, by the way. But it's like, you know, it's their job to put them at ease, you know, with what it is. So they're like, "Well what's in that?" "Well, I've eaten that a lot, so I can tell you what's in it." But, a lot of it's, you know, just fresh vegetables and meat, things like that.

SA: So for the First Friday do you like have a food booth or what do you do?

JC: We bring out tents and we set up tables and we have our spits, our auto-_____, like the big upright broilers, and we cut meat all day, put it in pans. We have our grilled chicken, things like that, and we have like a grill that we bring out. We just, you know, make hot food, it's warm right on the bat, and we're slappin' 'em together and we have our sauce and stuff, and people are, you know, buying beverages. And we bring out spinach pies, we bring out baklava, things like that, so people are just, they see it all and they're just like, "Well that looks pretty good." And then we easily, you know, there'll be times when we get two or three repeat customers, "Well I'll get a hot dog. Well, I'll try I gyro. That was really good!" So, you know they come into the restaurant and we, I've worked other places where they've done delivery so I kind of spearheaded that with this restaurant. So we do delivery out to Kenyon, things like that, where, it's kinda like, you know with Kenyon or the Naz you're gonna have people that are coming from areas that have this stuff and it's not scary to them. So it's not like a midwest college or something like that where they've never seen anything but corn, and it's like, so it's very easy, we can take our stuff out there and sell it and people know exactly what it is and that helps too, because then it, you know there are other people that haven't had it with the ones coming in. But that's the whole point of First Friday though is to get that product out there for people to really see, even if they just never eat anything but gyros. Cause we have the Mansfield stores, they sell all this stuff, but it's like, you know, ninety percent of what they sell is the sandwiches, you know. And we do, like for instance, this whole middle insert (gesturing to menu) is just getting into like specialty Greek foods and things like that, they won't even try it there because they don't really, they're like, "We just want gyros," more or less.

SA: I thought you said that there was a bigger actual Greek like immigrant Greek population in Mansfield?

JC: There still is and that's the other ten percent of the menu, where they're coming in for the Greek spaghetti, like macaroni and me kima, the pastichio, moussaka, things like that, you know, they're gonna come in and get all that stuff. But see, and then they're limited to like this stuff here, so a lot of this, you know, we have a meatball dish, roasted chicken dinner, roasted lamb, things like that that are very Greek. But limited, like on our menu we try things where we bring in fried calamari and get a little more like regional as opposed to just focused on the Greek. Or

we do, we make a fresh tabouli salad, we do schug, which is more Middle Eastern but it works with our food, like spices and cilantro sauce, and then I eventually started making from scratch Greek sausage, things like that. I mean, to where it's been so popular Lanning's actually has to make it for us now, fifty pound batches. I would make it three pounds at a time and sell three pounds, and then maybe six pounds and eighteen pounds. And like the second time I had to make eighteen pounds in one week I'm like, "Can you guys make this for us?" And then it's kind of just taken off from there.

MBW: You mentioned that they used to get all these ingredients from Greece. Now where does most of your food, your ingredients, come from?

JC: A lot of it's gonna come in, like Chicago seems to be one of the big Greek hubs more or less, to where you've got, like Michigan, you've got stuff comin' in there. But you know, huge, I mean you have Greektown actually in Chicago, so you have a lot of that and even you know international, like Toronto, Toronto has a large Greek community. But the hubs, as far as like Cleveland and Chicago are like the big places cause you've got sorta like the big bakeries and things like that. We get some of our specialty items, like our specialty baked goods, we get our Easter bread, it's called tsoureki, it's very traditional Greek Easter bread. It comes in so we get from them. We only have one oven, with one shelf, so we do our baklava, we do baklava brownies, but we also have to roast lamb and do all this other stuff. So the limited, so some of like the specialty cooking and other like baklava rolls, things like that, we buy from it's called the Athena Bakery, in Cleveland. Our phyllo dough that we make our baklava with, they're like one of the biggest producers on this side of the hemisphere, so they ship it, they actually ship, they actually make more phyllo dough in Cleveland than they make overseas where they use most of it, so that's kind weird.

MBW: Woah, that's cool! So you were talking about getting new customers, who comes here, for the most part? Like do you have a lot of regular customers or is it mostly new?

JC: We have a lot of regular customers, like Monday thru Friday we have a pretty standard lunch crowd. We get like the Siemens crowd, Ariel, you know, it's taken awhile to get Ariel because they're on the other end of town, but they are coming downtown all the time. We have, you know, a lot of merchants here downtown, they all come in and eat and they're much, you know, they come in after the lunch rush and you'll see, you know, Steve from the clock shop, you'll see the Dukes from Down Home Leather, all these people coming in, and the flower shop. But really it's a pretty standard, just rush in, people know, a lot of the offices like the big county office, things like that, I mean these are all faces that I know on a daily basis. They all come in, they eat, you pretty much know what they're gonna get, and then they're out the door. And then we get a lot of delivery from like doctors' offices, or places, you know, mainly from the other end of town where they can't get in here and get out and back to work in their allotted time, so we run

delivery, things like that. But new customers, like Saturday people drive around and we get people, they're looking to avoid chain restaurants, they don't want Burger King, they don't want Bob Evans, they don't want Cracker Barrel, and they'll stop and eat at the corner Greek restaurant, and then they rave over it. But it's like the thing is, that's great, but then they live in Indiana, or they're on their way to someplace else so you never see them again. You know, so it's kind of like a mix but we're trying to get more of our base customers from here in the area cause a lot of it, yeah, the people around us are gonna support us, moreso as, you know, in higher concentration if they're close. You know, the people who live in the apartments, you know, delivery, carry-out, they come down and eat. And the further out you go the less, you know, you gotta work a little harder to get those people downtown. So unless they're going to college, or they're buying flowers, or something like that, or gettin a tattoo, you know, it's like why are they going downtown? They're gonna go to Walmart. So we wanna get them, that ties in with the merchants, we wanna bring them downtown to shop and eat, you know, to benefit everybody.

SA: Do you get a lot of college kids, or no?

JC: Oh yeah. Well like with the, this year they're doing the shuttle from Gambier, I mean, you look out the door on Fridays and Saturdays and you see like ten college kids walking across the square, it's like, they're comin in!

SA: Yeah. That's huge cause they didn't have that our freshman year, like they had a shuttle but it just went to Coshocton and it didn't come downtown, and I think that's crazy that it's going downtown now. That's really good.

JC: Yeah. And there's a lot of, I mean, it's been pretty good as far as just people, they're not lookin' for trouble, they're not lookin' to do anything they just want to experience and that's great, especially with the offices they're building downtown and things, you know that's part of this. We're just trying to give everyone something to do down here. And then, well what was the original question? I'm gettin off topic there.

MBW: It was just about the customers, who they are...

JC: Right, yeah so percentage wise, you know, we've got of course older folks, they grew up eating lamb and things like that, so that isn't as scary to them because they would have a lamb for dinner on Sunday, or things like that, and you don't see that much anymore. So it's, you know, fresh vegetables, things like that, that's how they grew up, that's what they wanna eat. You know, construction workers come in, gyro, fries, their coke, whatever. And then you get, like Saturday morning, you get the adventurers, they're coming in, you know, give us the _____, they wanna try everything, they want the calamari, you know, things like that. And it kinda depends on, you know, travellers seem to wanna eat everything, and then the locals, they

come in for the sandwiches, they want a quick and go, they might come in for dinner Friday nights, things like that. So it kinda depends, I mean, we don't have a demographic because I've seen a five year old kid pick up a whole gyro and start eating it, you know, and it's like, "That kid'll never eat that--Oh, hey, he likes it, okay!" And there's no, one thing, especially where we're at you cannot predict the business, you cannot predict who's coming through the door or when they're coming through the door. So we just take em as they come and we know that no matter what it is, we know we can feed them something good.

MBW: Yeah. Are you pretty consistently busy during like meal hours?

JC: Yeah, during peak times, like you know like eleven to two, you know, generally the phone starts ringing about ten till eleven, before we open. Yeah, we get big orders to the factories, to the hospitals, things like that, pretty, may not be the same day-to-day but pretty consistently. We knock those out, so we might have, as lunch starts you might have a three hundred dollar carry-out order with twenty-five people that all want their name on their bag. So then you gotta keep all that organized, plus take care of everyone that came down and is sitting in the restaurant. So over the years we've had to, we've tweaked that so now we're pretty good about taking care of everybody but as far as, you know, guests, lunch you want it a little bit quiet come in after two. And then about five o'clock it starts picking back up again and then you have, this is the first year we have the hotel across the street. I don't know it, were you around when the old Curtis Hotel was there? Cause it was, there was always a hotel on that corner, since the beginning of the last century. And it was rebuilt in the sixties and by the time we opened it was kind of a, you know, not a savory place, you know, a lot of issues there. So then, you know they just tore it down--so we opened, and they tore it down so then we didn't have any of that business. So then it took em almost two years to get it built, so this is our first year, so we're getting a lot of that traffic too now, to where, you know, it's bringing a lot of visitors, you know, to some of the other factories and things, like Ariel. So you're getting like international people, so that this is more welcoming than, say, Bob Evans or any place else would be. It's like, "Well Greek, yeah, I know Greek, it's like from the Middle East or something," there's gonna be baklava and lamb and things like that that they will eat. Or Indian people, if they don't want to eat meat or something like that there's a lot of options for them that the flavors and textures are familiar.

MBW: Why are all of these travellers coming here? Like what brings them to Mount Vernon?

JC: A lot of, I mean, you got two major universities, at this point, you've got, not only just here but just down the road you've got Denison University, which is another very good school, very storied. So you've got all that coming here, and we have a lot of industry still here in town, where there's Ariel Foundation--or Ariel Company--the leader in what they do, with the compression fittings and all that. So where that stuff is going, it's made in Mount Vernon but it's put to use in, you know, deserts in the Middle East, in the rainforest in the Amazon basin, things

like that. So these people are coming here to see their equipment, they're training on the equipment here, I mean there's trailers and things for them to work, so it's like a mock of what basically they're gonna sell people like an industrial complex, more or less, for their regions. Like my uncle, he works for Siemens, and he travels to, like in three months he's been in Italy and Serbia and Russia, you know, talking to them. He's going South America, he's going to Brazil, you know, so he's selling components for energy plants and things like that. So you know, he comes in here and he knows everything too. So all these people, they're coming and, you know, Siemens is training, right now there's a group of Chinese people with one translator for the whole group and they came here for lunch because, you know, it's good fresh stuff. So it's just like, you know, they're coming here, you know, the middle of Ohio is a pretty interesting place with all of this stuff happening. So it brings in, any other place you wouldn't see such international crowd this far from a major hub, so it's kinda interesting.

SA: Is that why, I mean I just, you have Greek music playing, the vibe in here is kind of--is that why you try to keep it so authentic?

JC: Yeah, I mean there's an atmosphere that goes with it. If you're going, you know, QFM 96 or, you know, ACDC or something it's not gonna really go with the flow. And there are people that wanna buy the soundtrack and it's just stuff that we've, you know, recorded or whatever but it's like, I can't think of what the movie is, but you know there's like some soundtrack songs and things like that that are recognizable. So you know, you wanna build the whole atmosphere and work in the colors and things, so we tried very hard to put that together.

MBW: So what are, it seems like you, in terms of tourists, are very successful. What are some ways that you convince local people to come here instead of like to Coshocton?

JC: A lot of it is just, you know, we have to spend the money in either advertising or sampling. That's the biggest thing because unless, if I can't put in your mouth, and you eat it, it's like, you're gonna be like, "Oh that's pretty good." So it's like, I've done trays, so I'll do like desserts or spreads and pita breads, meats, things like that, and I'm like, "Look, try this, share it around the office, here's some pita bread, here's cards, here's coupons." You get out there and a lot of it is you have to almost literally drag people in. Part of it too is like you see somebody, like we're gonna have, you know we've got this small section that's hotdog, hamburger, cheeseburger, you know. People didn't know we had cheeseburgers, I had to put cheeseburgers on the sign, "We've got cheeseburgers!" "Oh, they've got cheeseburgers, I'll come in now," you know. And that's what some of our specialty burgers and things, you know, that are more recognizable. I've got a sandwich called greuben, which is like a gyro-reuben sandwich, where it's built like a reuben but it's got lamb meat and then we use, instead of thousand island we use our tzatziki sauce, but made into a thousand island called tzatzousand island, so it's like just using what we have, but reinventing something classic that's more recognizable for people. "Well, I like a reuben, so

okay I'll order that," and then it comes and it's got its own little following. It's kinda like, you know, we offer prime rib. You can not like anything else on our menu, but come in for the prime rib. So you know, it's like the chicken breast, things like that, there are things that you kinda have to put out there, you know, cause if we didn't do burgers, if we didn't do things that were recognizable, we wouldn't have been able to build the business, per se. But it's like, you know, that's the kinds of things that you have to do is you have to have a mass appeal even though you're nitch. So it's kind of a weird balance that you have to have.

SA: And also, like at least for my family, my mom and I love ethnic foods but my dad like hates, he likes his cheeseburger, you know, like it includes the whole family.

JC: Right. That's the big thing, it's like you can go to Olive Garden and eat a steak, you know, there's always that guy that has to have, you know, "I only eat the steak," or "I only eat the fish," things like that, no matter where you go. And it's kinda what it is, you know, and then people, once they get comfortable coming in here, and maybe they're stealing something off of someone's plate, and they go, "Oh, that's good, I'll get that next time"...So really there's been very few people that have ever, you know, if you look at Facebook and this like that, we've got into social media pretty good, and it's like, you know, we're like the number one rated restaurant on Trip Advisor most of the year, you know, things like that, from our reviews and things like that. We get a few oddballs that people will be like, "Zero! I hate you! But why I'm not gonna tell you." So I don't try to, you know, the people that mainly come through, you know, if they take the time, great, if they got something to say. I try not to respond to either the good or the bad, just because I'm more concerned, I'm trying to make the face-to-face count more than that. I don't want to, you know, get stuck on the computer trying to fix someone's problem when they're not even here anymore. It's like, well, you didn't say anything, you know, I'm here sixty hours a week and I'll ask you if you come up if everything was great, so it's like if I can't make you happy, I'm sorry but I'll take care of everyone else who comes back in so.

MBW: So right now in our class we're talking about public spaces, or like spaces where people can run into someone they know and like chat sort of unexpectedly. Do you think that there are ways that this restaurant serves as a space like that?

JC: Absolutely, yeah. I mean there are, as far as social media, I don't try to follow it but I've seen it where we're tagged as like someone's coming in, I try to see what's going on with it, and it's just like, "Had a great meal with such-and-such, haven't seen them in years!" or "Hey, we're going here, meet us there!" kinda thing. So that does happen where we're specifically part of plans, but even, you know, everyday people walk in and then they see someone they know and then it ends up being a table joining or, like "Hey, oh my gosh," and then they're standing in the way for half an hour as they talk to people so it's like it becomes something like that

automatically. But I wish we had more room for that but, were limited by like sixty seats you know and a big chunk of them are counter seats.”

MBW: I don't know that we have any, like specific questions left but is there anything else that we haven't ask you that you feel like is super important for us to know about the restaurant, or the downtown, or your experiences?

JC: I mean, as far as, you know, a recap I guess, more so than anything, is that people have kind of gotten away from downtown America, you know, more so for the shopping centers and things like that. And then you go look at Columbus and see the sprawl, you know, as I was growing up I've seen many communities towards Columbus have been swallowed up--you know, they were their own and then they just kind of been paved over with Columbus, so now they're all just kind of Columbu-Berryville kinda thing, and you know it's great still, you know, eventually we'll probably be in that too, but to still see a downtown that has kind of survived that, like if you look at like Powell or some place in Columbus where they're just completely surrounded by, you know, they're putting apartment complexes out like sod almost, rolling em out, new roads and stuff, but you still see these little downtown communities despite that, like German Village, Powell, places like that, Bexley, that they still have a downtown eclectic kind of feel. So it's like that's always gonna be part of it, but I think that, you know, there's more of a reason to try to patronize family owned establishments and things like that to help, you know, kind of go along with that and that's why you see there's been kind of a trend in that, to where you see Walmart's closing now things like that and no one would have ever thought that that would happen kind of thing. You know, it's great to get a coffeemaker for twelve dollars but now that great place is shut down downtown so there's more people are learning the value of a small town community and stuff. That's about it really.

MBW: Just out of curiosity, you said you were born here, have you ever lived somewhere else or considered living somewhere else?

JC: I've considered, I mean I've travelled around a few places. I've lived and worked in Columbus, but I've travelled to other places, you know, Nashville, Chicago, places in Florida, things like that. I was kinda like a travelling trainer for a couple different companies over years so that allowed me, before I had a family and got settled, I had some experience really to just go, live out of a hotel, work a bunch of different places, meet different people and things like that. So there's kinda, I'm not so much sold completely, you know, there's a certain excitement about living in other places and seeing, cause like I know if this was on a corner in Chicago, this place would be full right now and we be doin ten million dollars in business. But, you know, we're here in Mount Vernon so we're happy to be here, but it's so good, it's like people will come in, when when someone comes in from New York or some place like that, and they go like, you know, “This is as good or better than anything I've eaten anywhere in the world,” you know,

that's a good feeling too. So like even though we're downtown and people never would have thought this would be here, that you would find something like this here at all, cause like we make a bougatsa, a pastry which is like a custard pastry with phyllo and cinnamon sugar and almonds and things like that, and guys come in and are like, "I've eaten this all over the world, you know different places," and he's like, "This is the best I've ever had." That's a pretty good compliment. So people can rest assured that when they do come here they're getting literally a world class meal in the middle of you know Mount Vernon, Ohio and that says something.

MBW: Okay can we get your full name?

JC: Jeremiah Cline, J-E-R-E-M-I-A-H C-L-I-N-E.

MBW: Okay, and what's your title?

JC: I'm general manager of this location.

MBW: Thank you!