



Weston's Kewpee Sandwich Shop

AUTUMN WESTON FEEDS
DOWNTOWN LANSING AT
ICONIC FAMILY-RUN
ESTABLISHMENT

Photos and Story by Phil Eich,
Storyville Social, as part of the
Michigan Main Street Story
Series

"My great grandparents bought Weston's Kewpee Sandwich Shop from the original owners, who had a location in Flint and one in East Lansing. They didn't like the location in East Lansing, so they moved it to Shiawassee Street and that was our original Lansing location for Kewpee's. It was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week with a drive-thru window. Then my great grandfather passed away and my great grandmother took it over.

We have the menu from back then in the back corner of our restaurant. It was just burgers: a flat top burger with loose meat. She'd start by putting 50 pounds of beef on the grill and then grind it all up in what was called a crumble, and then hand-pat the burgers. We did the burgers that way until the Great Depression.

You can't get it anywhere else. It's funny because I'm nine months pregnant and this is as long as I've gone without having a burger.

This little girl of mine does not like red meat. So, I can't wait to have a burger again! I think about it all the time and there's just nothing like it.

After my great grandmother, my grandfather took over the restaurant, followed by my dad. Then I took over about 15 years ago and it's been great to keep a good thing going. Ever since I was a little girl, all I wanted to do was work with my dad when I was older. I love what we stand for: good food and community. I say this place is like Cheers without beer. We love what we do and we love who we do it for. When you love what you do and who you do it for, it doesn't seem like a job. When you have the customers that we have, who are more like family, work is fun.

I love when you go to work and get to feed people who ask, 'How are you? How's the kids?' Customers become family and I love that. I love Lansing and they love us right back, because they've supported us for 99 loyal years, and this January we'll cross the 100 year mark.

Those customers choose to come here, so when they come in that door, it's also about how they are addressed and greeted. It needs to be personal because they're not just coming here for a cheeseburger. They are coming here for personal attention and my grandpa always said, 'You always leave them better than you found them.' That means knowing people's names and what they like and where they want to sit. We take joy in that.

We've also been blessed with amazing staff members who have been with us for a long time, some as long as 40 years. Tammy has been with us for 40 years and she's the only person outside of our family that makes the sauce—it's my great grandmother's secret recipe.

I love thinking about heading into our 100th year. Two years ago, we won a national award from the Food Network at the South Beach Food Wine Festival. We served up 3,000 olive burgers in one night. It was the busiest weekend I've ever had my entire life, but we won.

We were presented that award by Rachael Ray, and the owner also put on an awards show. The gentleman who gave us the award is a fourth-generation owner of his business as well, and he said something that stuck with me.

He said, 'This is an award for all of their work.' To know that I received an award not just for the work of myself and my staff, but for the work of my great grandmother and great grandfather, my grandfather, and my dad, is amazing. That made me feel super proud.

There's pressure that comes with that kind of legacy, sure, but with that, I get to come in every day and do what I love, and I'll keep doing it to the best of my ability."

—Autumn Weston, Weston's Kewpee Sandwich Shop, Lansing

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Michigan Main Street Story Series



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