

DEADWOOD WALL OF FAME

2008

Chalk Raymond “Pops” Wagner

Born: February 28, 1875

Died: November 6, 1967

Chalkley Raymond “Chalk” Wagner left a legacy of industry, thrift, enterprise, hope and faith in the great motivating power of God. However, a lot of Deadwood residents better remembered him for his cooking – especially his pie crusts, homemade egg noodles and cream of tomato soup.

Between 1894 and 1960, Wagner owned or operated a dozen Black Hills businesses, most of them restaurants, hotels or hotel dining rooms. The list included the Evans Hotel Dining Room in Hot Springs (1894), the Palace Café in Deadwood (1899), the Bullock Hotel Dining Room in Deadwood (1900), the White House Dining Room in Deadwood (1900), the Smead Hotel in Lead (1903), the Spearfish Hotel in Spearfish (1904), the Gilmore Hotel in Deadwood (1905), the Franklin Hotel in Deadwood (1909), the Hudson Automobile Dealership in Deadwood (1912), the Wagner Bakery and Café in Deadwood (1913), the Franklin Hotel Dining Room (1918), the Wagner Hotel & Café in Deadwood (1925) and the Sunnyside Cottages in Deadwood (1936 to 1960).

He married Dinise Marie Bertrand in 1895, and together they raised 10 children. Chalk and Dinise worked side by side at the Wagner Café and Hotel together at 27 Deadwood Street. She ran the front counter, and he ran the kitchen. Local historian George Moses wrote that during the 1920s the Wagner Hotel & Café was the place in Deadwood where locals took their out-of-town guests, business clients or anyone they wanted to impress.

“The railroaders from both lines that came into Deadwood always had their food at the Wagner Café,” Moses wrote. He said the restaurant was popular because it was open 24 hours a day, the food was excellent, and the Wagners truly cared about their customers. “It was not a wonder that people from miles around would come to the Wagner Café for dinner.”

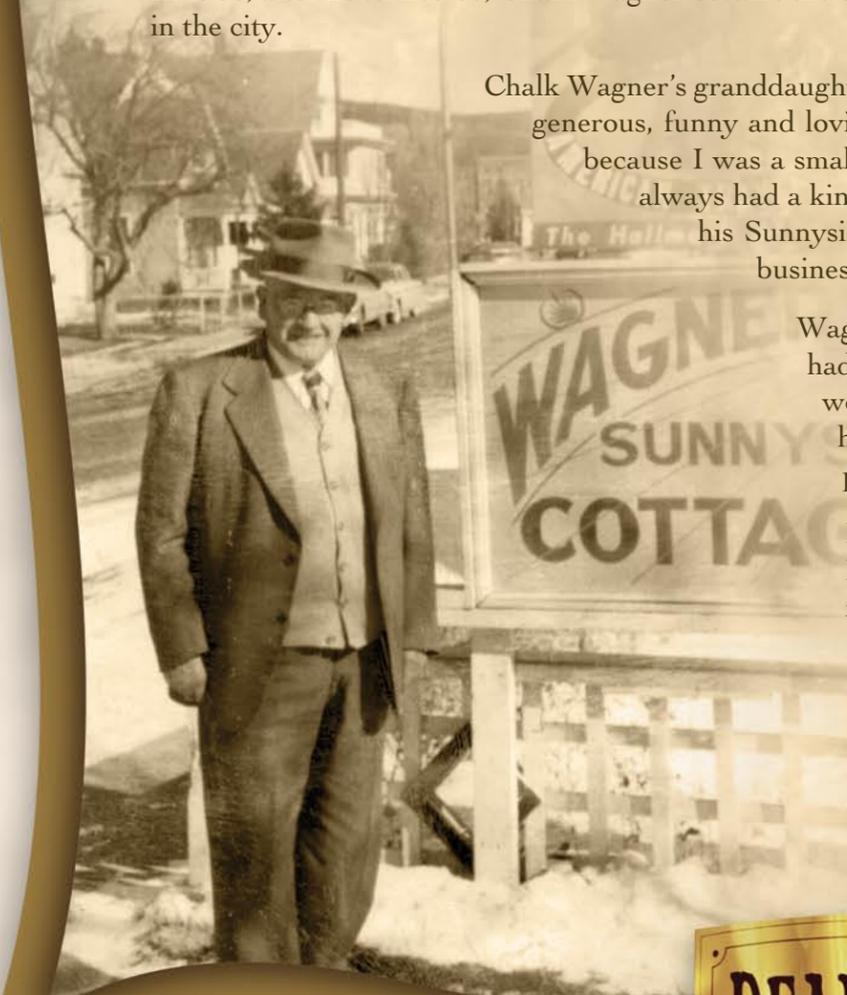
In 1936, after he turned 60, Chalk Wagner became the owner of Sunnyside Cabins in Deadwood, one of the first motels in the city.

Chalk Wagner’s granddaughter, Sandra Beshara of Rapid City, remembers “Pops” as a kind, generous, funny and loving man. “My memories of him are as a large man, but that is because I was a small girl. He was actually only 5 feet, 9 inches tall,” she said. “He always had a kind word and a smile on his face. He loved visiting with guests at his Sunnyside Cottages. The guests loved him too, because he had repeat business year after year.”

Wagner kept an extensive rock collection in his motel office. He also had a jigsaw puzzle in progress, his granddaughter recalled. “Pops would invite you to ‘work’ the puzzle with him. He didn’t need the help, because in the blink of an eye he could find any piece and place it perfectly. He just liked the company,” she said.

In January 1950, Bishop William T. McCarty of the Rapid City Diocese conferred on Chalk and Dinise Wagner special medals from Pope Pius XII – “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice” – to honor their distinguished and zealous service to St. Ambrose Church and their exemplary lives in Deadwood.

“Because of his thrift, hard work, dedication and entrepreneurial spirit, he was able to raise 10 children, live well and leave his family a legacy of determination, perseverance and motivation,” Sandra Beshara said.



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