

Blue Drummer president tells of fast food role

Dover and New Philadelphia have at least 15 businesses engaged in fast food service. Several of them are franchise operations, an aspect of the business which has grown to an \$11.5 billion operation in the U. S. in 20 years.

Thomas F. Orr, formerly of Dover, talked about his role in this field at last week's appreciation breakfast held by the Tuscarawas County Chamber of Commerce in the Blue Drummer Steak House. Orr is president and board chairman of Van-Orr Foods Inc. of Zanesville, which operates the Blue Drummer.

"Sometimes people think chain operations come into a community to take out of it, but this is not true," Orr said. His company, which holds four Famous Recipe and three Blue Drummer outlets, has 450 employees and a payroll of \$100,000 to \$150,000. Their managers become local residents and employees are hired locally, he added.

ORR, A GRADUATE of Sugarcreek High, operated a furniture store in Van Wert before entering the food business in 1968. He started with the Dover franchise for Famous Recipe, which he lat-

er sold to William Marino. In 1971, the company moved to Zanesville, where it held a Ponderosa franchise later sold back to the company. Orr said the board of directors decided to base the company in Muskingum County because it was the center of its marketing area, offered easy access to suppliers and had a good airport.

Orr said Blue Drummer was organized by acquiring the Chuck Wagon Steak House and the Drummer Boy chain. He said the steak house theme was switched from Western to colonial American to provide a more restful atmosphere. The New Philadelphia Blue Drummer, which opened in 1974, was the first expansion outside of Zanesville. There also are outlets in Circleville and Washington Courthouse and the company has Famous Recipe restaurants in Zanesville and Lancaster.

Orr said that when he entered the fast food business, 80 per cent of the people ate one meal per day in restaurants. He believes the time will come when that percentage may cover all three meals. To meet this demand, Van-Orr Foods

plans to spend \$3 million to open Blue Drummers in Coshocton, Cambridge and Chillicothe by November.

"Our 1977 building program is much more ambitious; however I'm not ready to announce specifics just yet," Orr said.

THE FAST-FOOD franchise business is highly competitive and Orr said the company is moving to meet its challenges. He said Blue Drummer will be adding seafood to its steak menu this year and he plans to introduce computers into operations within a year. He believes current sales of about \$25 million per year will reach \$50 million in 1978 and \$100 million by 1980.

Although Van-Orr Foods draws its local managers from the ranks of employees, its top management is related to the president. His son, Richard T., started as manager of the Famous Recipe in Dover and now is executive vice president of the company. Orr's son-in-law, John Kerns, is vice president of the steak division. A brother, Charles, directs the company's expansion program.