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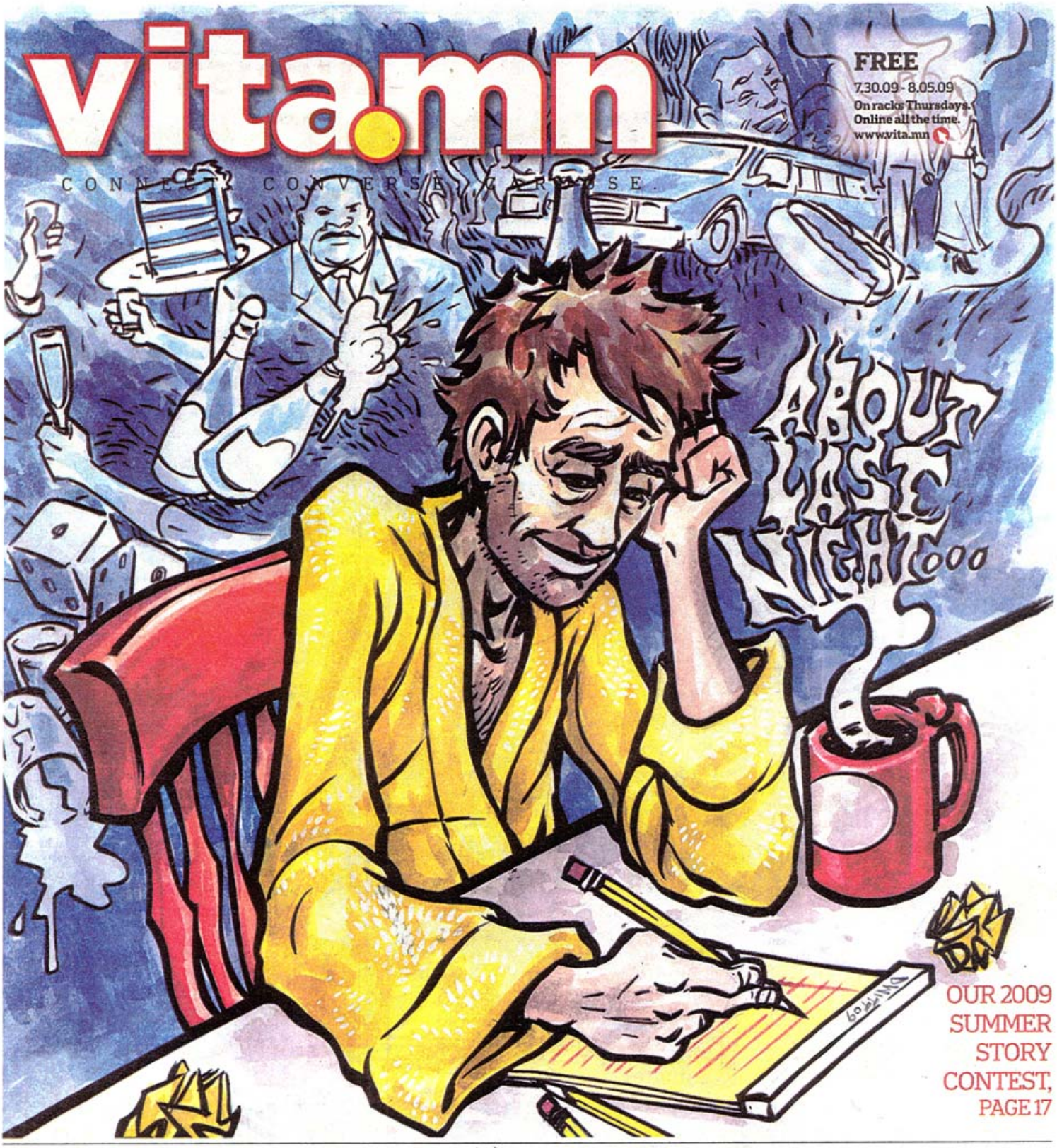


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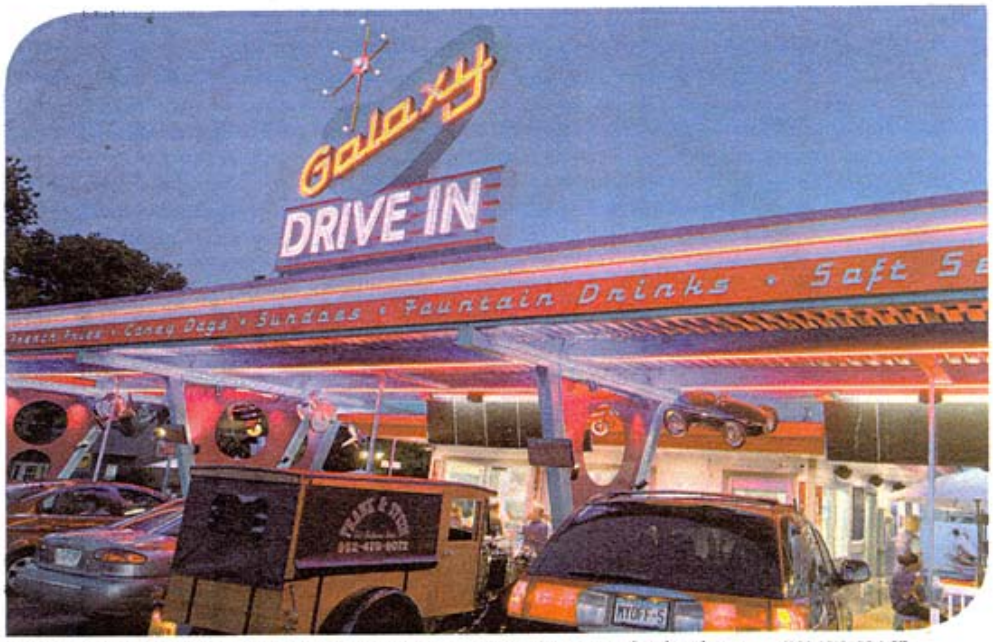


The former Wagner's has been remade into a thoroughly modern retro destination. TOM WALLACE

# Cosmic cuisine

## A St. Louis Park dive gets a Space Age transformation to become Galaxy Drive-In.

By RICK NELSON • rick@vita.mn

A shooting star on Hwy. 7.

How to explain the bumper-to-bumper craziness outside the Galaxy Drive-In? Maybe it's that Minnesota summers seem to fly by in about an hour and a half, leading us to maximize every second of outdoor enjoyment. Or perhaps the interest is anticipation-driven, as curiosity seekers have eagerly watched new owner Steve Schussler slap a dramatic, hey-look-at-me makeover on the formerly modest Wagner's Drive-In.

Whatever the reason, it's a good thing that my friend and I arrived a good 10 minutes before the gate opened. A line quickly formed behind us and, by the time we were scarfing fries, the place was a mob scene.

Let's be honest here: Wagner's was a dump. A lovable dump, one held together by paint and a prayer, but a dump nonetheless. Schussler, the eatertainery brainiac behind the Rainforest Cafe, has transformed schlumpy, unassuming Wagner's into an Event. The grounds are as pristine as Lakewood Cemetery (and peppered with almost as much statuary) and the building, gleaming with its shiny new purple, orange and aqua paint job, is a jazzed-up George Jetson-meets-vintage Howard Johnson. It's as if Schussler struck a Faustian deal with the surrounding residents: I'll make this joint sparkle like a cubic zirconia solitaire if you put up with the ensuing traffic. The place has "prototype" written all over it.

So does the menu, which covers the drive-in basics. First and foremost are a few hand-formed quarter-pound burgers (as well as double and triple variations), made with buttered and toasted buns and finished with grilled onions, thick bacon, a few cheeses and tangy pickles. There's a grilled chicken breast-bacon sandwich, a hoagie stuffed with sirloin and provolone, and several variations on the all-beef hot dog theme. A few kids' meals, too.

The fries are cut long and lightly seasoned, the onion rings are enrobed in a light beer batter, the thick malts have a tangy malt powder bite and the crispy, barely sweet coleslaw is made in-house. The whole shebang is cutely packaged in Space Race language: "Lunar Eclipse" grilled cheese sandwiches, "Cosmic" chicken dinners, "Blastoff" milk shakes. You get the idea.

The carhops are so enthusiastic that you wonder if Schussler limited his recruitment efforts to cheerleading squads. The Galaxy is also canine-friendly, right down to a pair of inexpensive dog treats on the menu.

It's tough to find a price over $5, and, unlike Wagner's, plastic is welcome. My advice: Arrive early, and mind your manners. After all, would you want a busy drive-in next door to your house?

**GALAXY DRIVE-IN**
**Location:** 3712 Quebec Av. S., St. Louis Park, 952-277-7777, www.galaxy-drivein.com.
**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily.