

Dish Omaha – August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Jeff:** It's Dish Omaha featuring KVNO's resident foodie, Diane Watson. Good morning, Diane.

**Diane:** Good morning, Jeff. Well, we're getting to the end of summer.

**Jeff:** No.

**Diane:** And I think ice cream. And then I think soda fountain. Can you conjure up a movie or TV show that featured an old-time soda fountain?

**Jeff:** I almost broke into Song, but I won't, but Happy Days.

**Diane:** Oh, Sunday, Monday. That's probably the one I think of too. I think we grew up around the same time. And then I think of Back to the Future.

**Jeff:** Oh, yeah.

**Diane:** Soda fountains have been a central spot in many, many TV shows and movies and a central spot in culture. You might be surprised to know that the soda fountain dates back to the 1700s, and it has its history steeped in medicine. The soda fountains were created by pharmacists. The first thing they ever served in a soda fountain was infused water with carbon dioxide. They really believed that soda water was a health tonic, that it had all kinds of early curative properties. And the drugstores started experimenting with flavors, partially for curative purposes, but also to help the medicine go down. And I was shocked to learn that Dr. Pepper, Coca-Cola, and Pepsi were all invented at soda fountains.

**Jeff:** Really?

**Diane:** By pharmacists.

**Jeff:** I did not know that.

**Diane:** Right. And then they became like a social center, like coffee shops, and they started offering ice cream, sodas, sundaes, that kind of thing. And by the 1920s, almost every pharmacy had a soda fountain. And Prohibition helped because people needed somewhere to go and something to have. And then they really declined between the 50s and 70s. Guess why? The rise of fast food.

**Jeff:** Oh, sure.

**Diane:** People were going to McDonald's and places like that instead. Now Omaha has got a pretty solid soda fountain history too. I remember going to Chris's Rexall.

**Jeff:** I was hoping you were going to say that.

**Diane:** Yes.

**Jeff:** That was the first one I thought of as well.

**Diane:** Right. And there was regular Rexall at 40th and Farnham, Powers downtown.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Diane:** And then there was Duffy Drugs. I don't remember that. Well, they closed in '68. That's why. But it was at 24th and Lake and was actually published in the Green Book. Yeah. And then there was Hamilton Pharmacy, which was called Phil's near Saddle Creek. They were all over. Of course, the king daddy of them all is the Durham. We're going to come back to that one in just a minute. There are places where you can go and still have soda fountain type experiences in the metro and even more in small towns around where we live. Hollywood Candy put in a soda fountain at the back of their store. They have a classic banana split.

**Jeff:** Me neither.

**Diane:** And I haven't had a banana split since I successfully dove off the high dive at Elmwood Park. And my friend's mom promised me a banana split. This one, if you remember, it's a banana with a scoop of chocolate, strawberry and vanilla, chocolate sauce, strawberry syrup and marshmallow.

**Jeff:** Marshmallow. Yeah. Good.

**Diane:** Very good. With peanuts and a cherry. There's the River House Soda Fountain in Platt Smith where you can get a black cow. Do you remember a black cow?

**Jeff:** I do not.

**Diane:** It's a root beer float with chocolate syrup.

**Jeff:** Oh, sure.

**Diane:** Yes. And there's Graley's Creamery where I thought of you when I saw this dish called a bombs, but it has an E on the end. It's vanilla ice cream drowned in espresso.

**Jeff:** Oh!

**Diane:** Yeah. That's pretty grown up.

**Jeff:** Yep.

**Diane:** Speaking of grown up, Fizzy's shows up on a soda fountain list. And, you know, if you haven't been there, it's a great breakfast spot where you order your food on a phone. And they have an incredible array of grown up soda fountain offerings, including my favorite, which is a frozen white Russian. Oh, nice. And if you have never had a white Russian there, it's vodka, dark rum, local coffee, coconut milk, vanilla bitters.

**Jeff:** And how about non-adult?

**Diane:** Yes. Plenty for children and people who are abstaining as well. But it's taking soda fountain to a new level.

**Jeff:** A new level, yeah.

**Diane:** Let's talk about the Durham. The Durham Soda Fountain has been there since 1931. They celebrated an anniversary recently and they had 500 physiologists, I believe is what they were called, come to the Durham to celebrate and do all things soda fountain. You don't have to have a ticket to the museum to go into the soda fountain.

**Jeff:** Really?

**Diane:** Yeah. You can just go. It's open to the public.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Diane:** They offer phosphates, malts, root beer floats, hand scooped ice cream. They wear their traditional uniforms. And of course, the Art Deco building is just stunning.

**Jeff:** It is. And there's something different between a malt and a shake.

**Diane:** Oh, yeah. It's the malt powder. I will take a malt every time. Every time. One of the things I love to get that's not ice cream related at the Durham is the Frito pie. To me, that just says Midwest.

**Jeff:** I don't know what that is.

**Diane:** It's probably what you imagine.

**Jeff:** I will.

**Diane:** Hamburger, cheese, sour cream. And they have an Art Deco delight float, which goes perfectly with their vibe. Milk chocolate hot cocoa over vanilla ice cream with whipped cream, caramel sauce and dark chocolate chunks.

**Jeff:** Yum.

**Diane:** Is it too early for ice cream?

**Jeff:** No, no. It doesn't matter if summer's in the waning days. We can do this any time of the year.

**Diane:** Love it.

**Jeff:** Thanks, Diane.

**Diane:** Thank you.

**Jeff:** Diane Watson, Dish Omaha.