



## Burgers and Beyond



# **MORE THAN MILKSHAKES:**

## **How Tacker's Burgers & Beyond Is Serving Heart & Soul to Searcy**

BY ASHLEY WILLINGHAM

**WALK THROUGH THE DOORS** of Tacker's Burgers and Beyond, and you are instantly wrapped in a blanket of nostalgia and Southern hospitality. The familiar sizzle of fresh beef on a flat-top grill and the sound of shakes being made act as a backdrop to the hum of conversation and laughter as Harding students dine alongside families. Outside in the parking lot, sheriff's deputies and state troopers park their patrol cars, grabbing lunch alongside local high-school students and retirees.

For the owner, Jeff Tacker, this is not just a restaurant. It is a sanctuary of safety, a place for making memories and, most of all, a mission.

**"Eating at Tacker's is supposed to be an experience," Tacker says. "We sell Coca-Cola, and we sell milkshakes, and we sell cheeseburgers, but really, we sell experiences."**

This commitment to connection is in Tacker's blood. The story begins in 1977 when his parents opened the original Tacker's Shake Shack in Marion, Arkansas. Growing up in the family business, Tacker's earliest memories are defined by the sights and sounds of the restaurant.

As an 8-year-old boy, he and his younger sister would pace the parking lot, five-gallon buckets in hand, collecting trash. For every full bucket, their father would hand over a shiny quarter. That quarter was immediately traded for a game of Galaga or pinball in the restaurant's arcade. By high school, Tacker's days were a whirlwind of football practice, quick cleanups, and late nights blending milkshakes behind the counter.

"The biggest thing is the people that we meet," Tacker recalls. "People from all over the world come through. And as a child, that was always mesmerizing because we were right on the interstate, and people came from all over the world to eat there, and it was neat to build that kind of network with people."

Though he spent years away from the griddles pursuing a career in ministry, youth work, and international missions—including time spent serving in Africa—the pull of home and family eventually brought him back.

In 2015, following his father's passing, Tacker returned to help his mother and sister run the business.

Over nearly 50 years, the Shake Shack became a local institution. Yet, when the opportunity arose to expand, Tacker knew they needed to evolve. To protect the family legacy and build something that could grow, Tacker joined forces with his son and nephew to establish the Tacker's Restaurant Group.

Searcy represents a critical step in that growth. While many modern fast-food chains are shrinking their dining rooms to push customers through drive-thrus as quickly as possible, Tacker's is intentionally going in the opposite direction. They seek out secondary markets where land is affordable, allowing them to build spacious dining rooms where ball teams, church groups, and large families can gather, sit, and stay.

**"In the bigger cities, land gets to be more expensive; they're building smaller and smaller dining rooms, and you just can't sit down. They just want you in and out," Tacker explains. "And that's good for what they want, but what we want, we want you to experience."**

That experience is already reshaping the community of Searcy. Even as newcomers in town, the Tacker family has made generosity their calling card.

When the Imagine and Believe Foundation hosted an appreciation dinner for local foster parents, Tacker insisted on taking care of everything. From drinks to desserts, Tacker's spoiled the foster families, refusing to charge the foundation a single dime.

**"We're a family," Tacker says. "And again, we're a family that wants to touch people's lives."**

For Tacker, success is measured by generosity. "My job is not to see how much I can get, but see how much I can give."

Tacker traces this philosophy back to a mentor—a successful lamp company owner who spoke to him just before Tacker moved to Africa as a missionary. The mentor told him, "Jeff, the reason I think God has made me so successful is that he expects me to give it away."

That quote became the North Star for Tacker's business model.

The generosity does not stop with foster families. Tacker's has a long-standing tradition of partnering with local charities. In the coming months, the Searcy location will host a Soup Sunday to

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benefit White County Domestic Violence Prevention Inc., the organization that operates Hope Cottage and the Hope Restored thrift shop. Tacker's will provide the soup, volunteers will bring the desserts, and the shelter will sell tickets for \$10 a head. Past events in other locations have raised thousands of dollars to support survivors of domestic violence.

This community connection fits perfectly with the safe, family-friendly environment Tacker is committed to maintaining.

Looking ahead, Tacker's plans to expand its footprint in creative ways. In Marion they are breaking ground on Memaw's Mini-Golf, an 18-hole, putt-putt golf course named after Tacker's mother, "Memaw," who is famous for her homemade peanut brittle. The course will feature whimsical, dessert-themed holes like a peanut brittle bridge and a hot fudge sundae water feature. Golfers will even be able to scan a QR code at any hole to have milkshakes delivered directly to them on the green. While the Searcy location does not have the space for a full putt-putt course, Tacker is already brainstorming ways to utilize the green space behind the restaurant to enhance the customer experience.

For Tacker, every detail matters—so much so that he prints his personal cell phone number on the tables.

**"If there's something that doesn't meet your expectations, you can text me, and that will start our chain of events to make sure we correct it, so that your next visit or maybe on the same visit, we'll be able to fix whatever issue you're having."**  
Tacker says, "Lots of people have my number and that just gives me an opportunity to keep my hand in with my managers to make sure that we're giving 100 percent to each customer that comes through."

It is a level of accountability and heart rarely seen in modern dining. In an era of automated service and transactional meals, Tacker's Burgers and Beyond is serving up something far more valuable: a safe, warm space where Searcy families can slow down, pull up a chair, and make memories that truly last. 🍷



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