The Saga of the Pool and Sweet Chocolate

The Worlds’ Finest Chocolate. If those four words remind you of Heelan candy bar sales, read on.

Thousands of Heelan students sold the sweet item to family, friends and neighbors to raise money for the new Heelan CYO, and then ultimately to raise funds for a swimming pool.

Mike Curran ’57 of Elk Point and Brendan Burchard ’60 had the same routine.

“We used to go down to the stockyards where truckers were coming in with loads of hogs and cows,” Curran says. “Sometimes people had to wait for an hour or more. We would just walk up and down the line selling candy bars.”

Read right for another sales technique.

The outcome of candy bar sales is legend. The CYO was built. The pool was not. After the space was shelled out, work stopped and the space stood empty for decades. Funds went to the CYO building in general.

Some graduates have felt short-changed. They should be grateful though, says Fr. Victor Raemaker, Heelan superintendent from 1976 to 1991. “When the priests and school leaders learned how much it was really going to cost they found out it was beyond reach,” Raemaker says. “It wasn’t about just building the pool, but maintaining it, which was very costly. I support that decision not to finish the pool project.”

Priests on the Heelan board decided not to burden parishes and families with more fundraising to fund annual pool expenses.

Today Heelan boys and girls swimmers and divers compete on city-wide swim teams. (True to the Heelan spirit, Heelan students have been active team members and swim team stand-outs.)

Pool Area Now the Wrestling Room

Today, the top of the swimming pool space is in full use. What ultimately became the “Mole Hole” basketball court area was expanded into a fully-equipped fitness center and then transformed into the wrestling room in 2016. The room features open space for wrestler’s movements, new paint, improved lighting, Resilite mats and a cushioned subfloor to reduce the risk of joint injuries and concussions.

The adjacent fitness center is used by student athletes in 20 sports, coaches and others. Instead of peddling fine chocolate bars today, students sell restaurant cards to help raise funds for their sport.

A Tale of Candy Bar Sales

By Patrick Detches ’59

“I must relate one of my favorite stories of the “World’s Finest Chocolate Bar” era. My classmate, Jerry Jaminet, was sort of a recluse in school. Like a number of us, he was from a strained economic background…. But the fundraising candy bar changed all that. After the first week of the drive, when most of us ate four of the bars and maybe sold two, Jerry was ordering up two more boxes. We didn’t think much of it at first. The next week he ordered up five boxes. The gauntlet had been thrown. None of us were going to be outdone and we must have irritated entire neighborhoods (as well as entire families) with the trooping out of the candy bar brigade.

“It got to the point that Jerry was handed the keys to the storeroom by Fr. Studer so he could pick up as many boxes as he could carry out. A few days later, Jerry would hand over a boatload of cash and get more boxes. I couldn’t take it anymore, so I asked Jerry ‘where the hell was he selling all the candy.’ He grinned and said, ‘Lower 4th.’

“At that time, lower 4th Street was considered “Skid Row” and I knew it well. My mom was a cook for years at Mook’s Cafe next to the burned out barber college. Jerry told me he would cruise the bars every night hawking his wares. Many a man deep in his suds would toss down a $5 bill for one candy bar and say, “Keep the change kid.” I believe there were 24 bars in a box at 50 cents each ($12). Jerry was also selling whole boxes of candy for $15-$20 each.

“So, the next time you visit the CYO building, try to imagine which wall was built by a bunch of “bar patrons” from the late ’50s.”