

Madeira's Connection to Iconic Frisch's by Carol (Klenk) Heck



Everybody has most likely heard about Frisch's Restaurants closing many of its doors after all these years. Every day it is in the news and on social media. Many of us are saddened to see the end of one of our favorite restaurants and childhood memories; as well as not being able to satisfy our taste for those famous Big Boys and that signature tartar sauce. I have to add that in my opinion, the ranch dressing was the benchmark for perfection. But what does this have to do with Madeira history? Dave Frisch, who was the president of Frisch's Big Boy lived right here in Madeira.

First a little background: A restaurant called Frisch's Café was opened in Cincinnati by Russian-born Samuel Frisch in 1905. His son, David Frisch, was 3 years old then and had 9 siblings. They lived on West Eighth Street in the West End. Samuel's wife died two years later in 1907. In 1910, "Samuel closed the restaurant and he and his children moved to Norwood where he opened another café. In 1915, Samuel was able to purchase a new building, also in Norwood, and opened a restaurant called Frisch's Stag Lunch." *¹ His son, David Frisch seen here, had dropped out of Norwood High School a few years early to work full-time in this family-owned restaurant. Later, David went back to high school and graduated in 1923. His father died that year leaving David to step into his father's position managing the restaurant at only 20 years of age. David was joined by his brother Irving, 22 years old, and Reuben, 18 years old, to run the business.



Around 1933, nine to ten years after his father passed away, David sold his interest in Frisch's Lunch Inc. to his brothers and ventured out on his own restaurant career. Success and failure were no strangers to David. After some financial set-backs he tried again and successfully opened the "first year-round drive-in restaurant in 1939 calling it the Mainliner". *² located on Wooster Pike in Fairfax.

The building you see here was depicted as being the Mainliner in 1942 in the extensive display within the recently closed Wooster Pike Frisch's restaurant. The outdoor sign at the right of the photo shows the passenger Ford tri-motor airplane which was a typical fly-over from nearby Lunken airport.



"By 1944, a second Frisch's opened, designed to resemble George Washington's Mount Vernon home." *³ It was on Reading Road

in Bond Hill by the Norwood Lateral entrance and exit ramps.

Dave Frisch moved from Norwood to Madeira in 1946. He and his wife, Annette Frisch, were the original owners of a house on Sanoma Drive. Living with them were their two grown daughters, their two sons-in-law, and their two small grandchildren. It was a modest house with a stone construction.

Another lucky advancement happened in 1946 when Dave met a restaurateur (Bob Wian) who was selling Big Boy double-decker sandwiches in California. Dave and Bob Wian struck a deal for only \$1.00 and Dave got the first franchise of the Big Boy sandwich. He then added the Big Boy name to his Frisch's restaurant. His franchise was later extended to Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana; followed by Florida.

Dave changed the recipe of the West Coast sandwich. The original sauce in California was thousand island dressing, but Dave and his brother Irving, developed the original recipe for a tartar sauce which, as you all know, was a huge success. This is when he first introduced the first Frisch's Big Boy sandwich to the menu and only charged 45 cents! The \$1.00 agreement lasted for a long time. Later, he fashioned his Big Boy statue a bit differently from the West Coast mascot.

"Silverton-based Food Specialties Company had been making the famous sauce for Frisch's since 1946 under a handshake agreement between the manufacturer's grandfather and Dave Frisch. The Food Specialties Company is the sole owner of the secret recipe." *¹ Frisch's released the sauce to local grocery stores in 1991.

Around 1948, Dave and Annette moved into another brand-new house on Cherokee Drive selling the Sanoma house to one of their daughters, Shirley and her husband, Albert Heinichen. Daughter Blanche was married to Jack Maier and they eventually moved to Indian Hill.

The new house on Cherokee was on a wide lot and was specifically designed to have a full test kitchen in the basement. Here, Dave could concoct new recipes and try them out on his friends, family, and employees. Dave also brought his restaurant servers and managers here to his test kitchen to have training sessions. Speculation is that the Brawny Lad and Swiss Miss came from this test kitchen on Cherokee.

"The property actually sat on 3 plats. The one on the farthest right was called 'Spring Lot'. That deed says that owners are required to allow public access to the percolating springs in perpetuity." *⁴ Dave's backyard swimming pool had a covered screened structure. And he partially paved another area to allow his Frisch's service trucks to park in the backyard. "The back parking lot was occasionally used for landing a helicopter to take Dave Frisch to business trips, giving the neighbors quite a thrill." *⁴. He also kept ponies for his grandchildren.

By 1949, a third location was listed in the William's Ohio Business Directory. This would be the location on Central Parkway across from



Photo credit of Cincinnati Museum Center

the Vehicle Safety Lane. This location was known back then as Big Boy One. It was the first real Frisch's Big Boy drive-in Restaurant. This next photo shows the interior of Big Boy One which I believe had more outside drive-in spaces than it had indoor dining accommodations. The restaurant business just grew and grew from there.

A small tidbit of information; Frisch's Filet of Sole fish sandwich was so successful on Friday's during Lent, that in 1962, McDonald's owner, Lou Groen, had to come up with his own Filet 'O Fish to compete with Frisch's and regain his lost customers.



Dave involved his family in Frisch's Inc. Many held titles within the corporation over the years. He himself, continued to bus tables during the lunch hour at one of his restaurants to stay close to his customers. By doing this, Dave could see that his original principles were upheld and the quality of service was top-notch.

He passed away in 1970, the year that the Hot Fudge Cake hit the menu. Dave had been living on the corner of Crinstead Court and Lancewood in Madeira. After his death his son-in-law, Jack Maier, became president. At Jack's death in 2005, the ownership of the business passed to Jack's son, Craig Maier.

When I first started volunteering at the Madeira Historical Society in 2019, I noticed a "Frisch Lane" street sign leading into McDonald Commons. (The park on Dawson Road was named after past mayor, Dan McDonald.) Since then, the park has been completely changed and I cannot find that sign anymore. I heard from Craig Maier, himself, that the sign was originally put there because Madeira acquired the land for the park with Madeira's share of Dave's estate tax money. (Construction of the park first started around 1975 and opened in 1978.) Now I know why the sign went up. But I don't know where it is now. But I do know that Dave Frisch sounds like a great role model who had a wonderful impact on Madeira and countless successful widespread business ventures.

1. Wikipedia Frisch's <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frisch>
2. Frisch's.com/story/
3. fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/frisch-s-restaurants-inc-histories/
4. Madeirahistoricalsociety.org, Audio Tour – Historical Residences, Frisch Home by David Holwadel, additional information.

Photos courtesy of Frisch's Mainliner display on Wooster Pike, Facebook, Find a Grave, and Cincinnati Museum Center.

Originally written January 2025. Updated July 2025 with information from Craig Maier, - President and CEO, Frisch's Restaurants, retired, and Karen Maier, former VP of Marketing. Thanks to Norwood Historical Society for even more information on Dave Frisch and the family restaurants.

Also go to Madeira Historical Society's website (madeiraHS.org) to hear two audio tours and additional information by Dave Holwadel about the house at 6022 Cherokee Drive.

Below is an additional photo I found of Norwood Frisch's Big Boy at 4145 Montgomery Rd. at the corner of Hopkins.

