

# Across from the Dinosaur, a building speaks about Easton C. Jones

**B**onnie Crowe didn't think she had any photographs of her grandfather, at least not any that portray him on the job. She told me if she found something, she'd call me back.

Less than an hour later, she did. She'd discovered a black-and-white image, very fragile, that she'd once kept in a wallet. Crowe works in the jewelry department at the Walmart in Central Square, and I went there to meet her and to borrow the photo. It shows a serious man in working clothes, near a sign offering a discount for anyone with Green Stamps.

Easton C. Jones.

That name, long buried under the layers of multiple renovations, has again been revealed above the entrance of Jones' old gasoline station in downtown Syracuse, at 260 W. Genesee St.

From the late 1980s until last summer, the building was home to Mimi's Bakery & Café. While few remember it as a gas station, Gary Nigolian, operator of Mimi's, said he once found the image of a flying horse — symbol of Mobil — on a wall there during an expansion.

In recent days, as people wandered past, the name above the door triggered an obvious question:

Who was Jones?

"The best way I can put it," Crowe said, "is that he did what he was supposed to do. He was a good guy."

By late summer, a Neapolitan-style pizza parlor is expected to open in the building, immediately across Willow Street from the Dinosaur Bar-B-Que. The new restaurant is a partnership between John Stage, Dinosaur co-founder, and his old friend, Paulie Messina, a longtime Dinosaur bar manager.

Stage often incorporates historic elements into his restorations, and he said he had no idea — going into the project — that the building was once a gas station. According to records at the Onondaga Historical Association, it hosted

**SEAN KIRST**

skirst@syracuse.com



PIZZA, PAGE A-2



The name of a Richfield gas station and the station's operator are visible in a view of the front door of what was Mimi's Bakery and Cafe. (Sean Kirst / skirst@syracuse.com)

SEAN KIRST

# Pizza place will keep retro gas station look

PIZZA, FROM PAGE A-1

several eateries from the late 1970s until the opening of Mimi's: The Act 1 Deli, The Headliner, The Hansel and Gretel Sandwich Shop.

This month, as workers stripped down the facade, they found remnants of signs for an old Richfield gas station, dating to the 1930s. On one wall, in big letters: LUBE. And above the front door, part of a "beautiful octagon" that Stage said was all but hidden until now:

Easton C. Jones.  
While he died more than 40 years ago, the discovery touched off a wave of memories for his family. Dolores Jones Tanner, of Manlius, was married to Dick Jones, Easton's son, a longtime Liverpool High School basketball coach who died in 1993.

Dolores vividly remembers the downtown gas station and its owner. Easton was a big man, she said, probably 6-foot-6. His nickname was "Herk," short for Hercules. He served in the Navy in World War II, and he came home to do what so many in his generation did. "My sense was that he was a very quiet, very reliable man who saw it as his job to take care of his family," said Dolores, now married to William Tanner.

Easton could be tough. Dick Jones told his wife a story of how he played three high school sports and also worked at the gas station for his dad.

One night, Dick had an important playoff game that interfered with his shift. His father told him: You come to work, or you lose your job.

Dick played. His dad kept his word. It was a while before Dick worked at the gas station again.

Yet Dolores also remembers a day when her children were little, and she was "in the midst of spaghetti and diapers," and her father-in-law stopped by, unexpectedly, for a cup of coffee. He stood there quietly, watching the kids play, then said to her:

"I just feel so good about this family. You're dealing so well with all those guys."

Dolores was stunned. That was an era, she said, when few men expressed deep emotion. "It was the nicest compliment I ever had from him," she said.

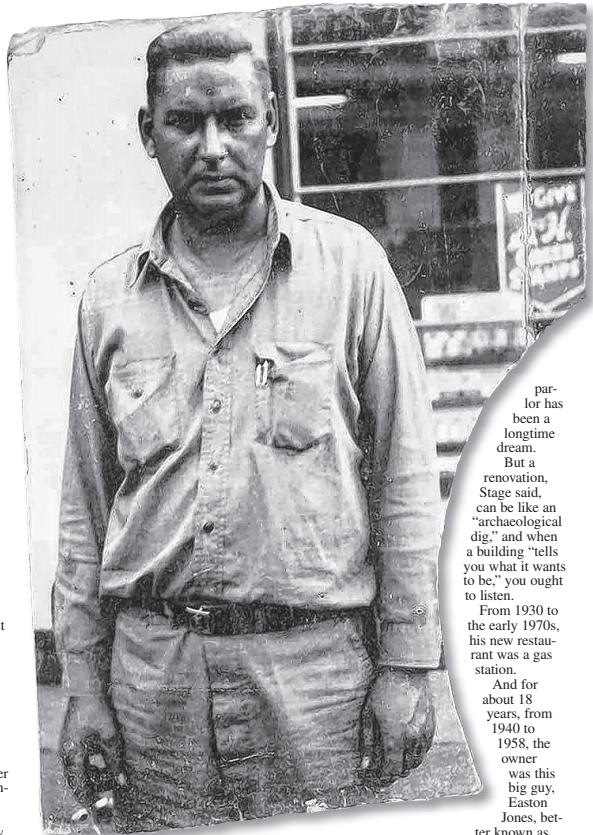
As for Bonnie Crowe, her mother was Easton's daughter, Ferne Jones Dykeman, who died in 1997. Crowe and her brother Bruce, now of Florida, both remember Easton as a Shriner. He'd coil his big frame onto a little motorcycle, they said, and entertain children during civic parades.

Crowe's father, Benjamin Proper, was a World War II vet and a volunteer firefighter in Fayetteville. In September 1951, Proper tried to extinguish a fire that erupted at his workplace, Stedford Chemical. There was an explosion. Proper, severely burned, died three days later.

When it happened,



Bonnie Crowe holds an old snapshot of her grandfather, Easton Jones, also shown below, who operated a gas station at what later became Mimi's Bakery and Cafe, across Willow Street from the Dinosaur Bar-B-Que.



par-  
lor has  
been a  
longtime  
dream.  
But a  
renovation,  
Stage said,  
can be like an  
"archaeological  
dig," and when  
a building "tells  
you what it wants  
to be," you ought  
to listen.  
From 1930 to  
the early 1970s,  
his new restaur-  
ant was a gas  
station.  
And for  
about 18  
years, from  
1940 to  
1958, the  
owner  
was this  
big guy,  
Easton  
Jones, bet-  
ter known as

Crowe was 17 months old. Her sister Linda was born only a few days before their father's death. Easton Jones, Crowe said, stepped in and played a critical role for his daughter and her children.

"If a pipe needed to be fixed," Crowe said, "he was the one to fix it."

More than anything, she remembers his quiet, commanding presence: Once he entered a room, he owned it.

By 1959, according to OHA records, the gas station

was being operated by "Bud" Hennessy, who died at 90 in February. His son, Jack, who pumped gas as a teenager at the station, said the family gathered in North Syracuse last Saturday, for Bud's burial. As for Easton Jones, he was only 61 when he died, in 1971.

So that is the tale behind the name on the wall of an old building few remember as anything except a restaurant. John Stage said that for himself and for Messina, opening a high-quality pizza

Hercules.

Don't be surprised, when the new pizza place opens, if he and Hennessy — in some way — are in a place of honor.

"Sometimes," Stage said, "you let a building speak for itself."

Sean Kirst is a columnist with The Post-Standard. Email him at skirst@syracuse.com. For Jack Hennessy's memories of the gas station, visit Kirst's blog at www.syracuse.com/kirst