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## From service station to ‘billions served:’

## McDonald’s location has history

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08 Aug 2015 | Written by Brandon Davis | Published in News |

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The corner of Joe Frank Harris Parkway and Grassdale Road will soon be home to a new McDonald’s restaurant. But it looked quite a bit different in 1955.

Grassdale Road itself was still a massive expanse of dirt, not yet paved with asphalt. And situated at its intersection with U.S. Highway 41 was a brand new Standard Oil service station owned by local farmer Gordon Howren. Howren’s farm sat on a 150-acre property, and he opened the service station as a new business venture. It was run by James Darnell and Marvin Cox, who rented the space from Howren.

But it wasn’t long before it became solely a Howren operation. Gordon Howren’s son, Michael, who is currently the owner of Michael Howren Realty and Storage Key in Cartersville, explained that he and his



SKIP BUTLER/The Daily Tribune News Construction is underway on the new McDonald's at Joe Frank Harris Parkway and Grassdale Road. The restaurant is currently hiring.

brother, after working at the station during their teenage years, eventually purchased and ran it themselves.

He said, "Through the years, my older brother, Gary — who's five years older than me — he started work there in high school ... and then later, when I was in high school, I worked there. And then my brother actually ran it. He bought out the people that operated it, and he operated it. And then he and I operated it together, after school and all."

The two men, who had grown up on the family farm with their brother, Terry, eventually left the station for other pursuits. But the Howren family maintained ownership of the property.

Over the years, the one-time two-bay service station changed tenants and became more of a convenience store. Gordon Howren passed away in 1989, followed by his wife, Mabel, one year later. For the next 24 years, the three Howren brothers would have ownership of the property.

Then, in early 2014, McDonald's came calling. The corporation wanted to put a restaurant on the property. So the Howren family, represented by Michael Howren Realty, began negotiations with the fast food chain. The process took quite a while, and included the careful

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### Cass, Woodland lose soft matchups Wednesday

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preservation of nearby Holt's Pharmacy, the negotiation of a deal with the tenant of what had by then become a Chevron station, removing all the gas tanks from the ground, receiving United States Environmental Protection Agency clearance, submitting plans to the city of Cartersville and obtaining building permits.

"It's a real complicated situation with McDonald's Corporation to put all this together," said Michael Howren. "We represent the family through Michael Howren Realty ... on our side of it, as far as putting the deal together through the real estate brokerage. And then, of course, they had their own broker. It's taken a long time to get it together, though." But, at the same time, Michael Howren said, he's happy that McDonald's is establishing a presence there.

"I think the good thing, Dad was always kind of a forward thinker," he said of his father. "He was a farmer, but he envisioned in 1955 that this would be a good place for a service station. So he put it up. So we feel like that Mother and Dad both would be really happy to know that there's a McDonald's there. Because who would've ever thought it back then? So even though there's some sentimental stuff there that we remember ... We feel like it's a good thing for us, it's a good thing for the area and it'll be a long-term thing."

Franchisee David Hamilton, who owns eight McDonald's restaurants in the Marietta-Kennesaw-Cartersville area, said the corporation decided to put a restaurant at that location for numerous reasons.

"McDonald's seeks out where the customer need is, and that area is underserved by McDonald's," stated Hamilton of the reasoning behind the decision for the location, which was determined by the McDonald's real estate team. "And that [area of] Grassdale and [Highway] 41 has been an area of opportunity, in terms of no competition, great traffic generators and just a position that we can afford our customers an opportunity to stop in and be convenient." Construction is underway on the new restaurant, and a sign in front of the location indicates it is hiring new employees.

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