



LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE ILLUSTRATION

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★ **FREE** ★

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HOT DOUG'S: 2001-2014

until we meat again

It's the end of the line for famed Avondale sausage shop **16-17**



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eat & drink

Doug Sohn, owner of Hot Doug's
E. JASON WAMBSGANS/TRIBUNE

BYE-BYE, MR. AMERICAN SAUSAGE GUY

A MUSTARD-LADEN FAREWELL
TO LEGENDARY AVONDALE
SAUSAGE SHOP HOT DOG'S

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

FRIDAY, OCT. 3: That'll be the day the lines died. After 13 years serving more than 200 different sausages, including oddities like yak and rattlesnake, Doug Sohn will close Avondale's internationally famous encased meats emporium, his namesake Hot Doug's (3324 N. California Ave. 773-279-9550). Residents of the 2800 block of Roscoe Street, which runs alongside the restaurant, likely will breathe a sigh of relief that sausage-seekers will no longer camp out on the sidewalks in front of their houses. Though Sohn said he doesn't know what his next adventure will be, we imagine he'll catch a couple extra winks this Saturday after closing. One thing we know is true is that encased meats enthusiasts everywhere will mourn the passing of a Chicago institution. While we can't convince Sohn to stave off retirement, we can celebrate the good times. We caught up with Sohn a few days ago to discuss the impressive numbers the business has racked up over the years. **MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR.**



IN THE BEGINNING

Doug Sohn's favorite hot dog in Chicago before he opened Hot Doug's: Byron's Hotdogs (1017 W. Irving Park Road)

Original planned opening date:

Elvis' birthday Jan. 8, 2001.
(Sohn loves Elvis and named Hot Doug's Polish sausage after him.)

Actual opening date:

"January 20-ish. I don't really remember the actual date," Sohn said.

THE DISASTERS

Number of times Hot Doug's flooded: 2

Number of times Hot Doug's caught fire: 1

(The restaurant's original location, 2314 W. Roscoe St., caught fire in May 2004 and the business was shuttered.)

WEDDING BELLS

Number of weddings at Hot Doug's:
1 real, 1 honorary

Number of wedding proposals: 3

“THERE ARE NO TWO FINER WORDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THAN ‘ENCASED MEATS,’ MY FRIEND.”

—Doug Sohn's friend **Robbie Butler**, said while deep-frying a turkey in the '90s. "And he told me I could use that quote for free," Sohn said. "Sucker."



FACTS ON THE SIDE: Sohn's favorite breakfast cereal: Kellogg's Product 19 // Approximate number of times The Clash's "London Calling" played on the Hot Doug's sound system: "Not enough," Sohn said.

THE CELEBRITY SAUSAGES

The original celebrity sausage:

Jackie Bange & Mash (as a means of earning the attention of a local WGN anchor). "It worked," Sohn said.

Sohn's favorite celebrity sausage:

"The week we opened, after I broke my leg, we featured famous people who broke their legs including [former Los Angeles Rams defensive end] Jack Youngblood and Barbaro [2006 Kentucky Derby winner that broke his leg in the 2006 Preakness]."

Celebrities who actually ate the sausage named after them:

Anna Kendrick, aka The Fire Dog, a spicy hot dog infused with cayenne and black pepper.



GETTY IMAGES

"I GET TO BE THE LAST CUSTOMER ON OCTOBER 3. I HOPE I'M NOT DISAPPOINTED."
—Doug Sohn



Customers dig into their lunch
BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE FILE

THE WAIT

2 HOURS
Approximate average wait time Saturday before the closing announcement

9 HOURS
Longest wait time any Saturday after the closing announcement

Number of hours Sohn has stood working the counter at Hot Doug's (approximate): "I don't know. I'd have to count the varicose veins in my legs," Sohn said.



ANDREW A. NELLES FILE PHOTO FOR TRIBUNE

THE FRIES

Sohn's famous duck fat fries were inspired by a visit to La Tupina in Bordeaux, France. Hot Doug's original duck fat fryer was a residential unit from Target. It took about 10 minutes to do an order, so Sohn kept a list of people who ordered them and would bring them out as they were ready. The list would reach an hour-long wait because he could only fry one order at a time.

DOLLARS AND CENTS

Fines paid for violating Chicago's brief foie gras ban: 1 fine; \$250 paid

Royalties Paul Kelly (Sohn's friend and co-worker who inspired the hot dog-eating quest that led to opening Hot Doug's) gets on his namesake sausage: "25 cents per bratwurst, but only when he's actually in the restaurant," Sohn said. "As far as he knows, we've never sold one otherwise."

Sohn's sage business advice before he opened Hot Doug's: "Never, ever, ever, ever open your own restaurant," Sohn said back in 2006. Given all the success he's had, does he still find this true today? "Still true," he said. "The second piece of advice, assuming one disregards the first: with other people's money."

BELIEVE IT OR NOT



Favorite sausage creation of all time (that isn't the classic Vienna dog): "The Uber Garlic, mostly because I had to keep telling the sausage maker to double the garlic after each sample and convincing him it wasn't too much garlic," he said. "Is there such a thing?"



NUMBER OF SAUSAGES MADE IN-HOUSE AT HOT DOG'S: 0

Sohn dreams up the topping combinations for his specialty sausages and makes a lot of the condiments, but he has never made a single sausage in house. The restaurant's classic Chicago dog is from Vienna Beef, and he works with local and national butchers and sausage manufacturers to make the specialty dogs. JESSICA TEZAK/TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

B-/C+

The average review grade of Chicago hot dog given by Sohn and his publishing company colleagues (aka the Hot Dog Club, which existed pre-Hot Doug's) when they reviewed hot dogs on their lunch breaks.



ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/TRIBUNE

FUN FACT Sohn brings his own hot dogs—wrapped in foil and stuffed in his jacket—when he visits Wrigley Field.

Number of World Series Sohn's beloved Cubs won while Hot Doug's was open: 0. "Yeah, that one stings a bit," he said. "But I have hope for 2017."

THE THEME SONG

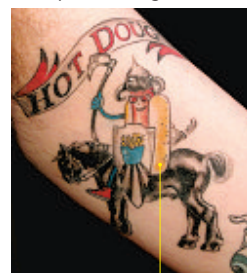
Sohn's friend Nick Markos thought he might need to advertise and would benefit by having a jingle. He created one, inspired by The Ramones' "I Wanna Be Sedated." The lyrics are as follows:

"I WANT TO EAT AT HOT DOUG'S
I WANT TO EAT AT HOT DOUG'S
I WANT TO EAT AT HOT DOUG'S
I WANT TO EAT A HOT DOG
I WANT THE FEEL, I WANT THE TASTE
I WANT THE MEATS THAT ARE ENCASED
DOUG'S IT UP, DOUG'S IT UP
I WANT TO EAT AT HOT DOUG'S
HOT DOUG'S!"

THE FAME

Movies about Hot Doug's: 1.

Theme song creator Nick Markos also is collaborating with his filmmaker brother Christopher to make a documentary about the last days of Hot Doug's.



Number of Hot Doug's tattoos Sohn is aware of: More than 100. (Sohn famously declared that any customer with a Hot Doug's tattoo would eat free.)

Number of mentions in the New York Times: 7. "I think that qualifies me for an obituary in the NYT, right?"

// Number of disco balls mounted on the ceiling at Hot Doug's: 1 // Brand of striped chef's pants Sohn wears in the kitchen at Hot Doug's: "Chef Uniforms. I'm particularly fond of the cargo pants," he said.