

ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORTH PARK AT LEAST TWO EL CAJON BOULEVARD BUSINESSES WERE DESTINED TO FIZZLE

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Who would open a business if everyone said that it would fizzle? Well, El Cajon Boulevard was home to two such businesses. Should we question the business savvy of the proprietors or should we compliment their tenacity? Perhaps we should applaud their efforts and be thankful for their foresight.

Located at 2030 El Cajon Boulevard and 3550 El Cajon Boulevard, the 7-Up and Coca-Cola bottling companies were anchor businesses in their days. How far back did these companies go? They date back to BC (before cans). On April 25, 1930, Coca-Cola opened for business at 3550 El Cajon Boulevard, a location that it would occupy until May of 1964. The Star Beverage Company, owned by brothers Harvey and Carrol Deem, followed a year later at 2030 El Cajon Boulevard and remained there until 1957. Actually, both businesses opened on El Cajon Avenue because it did not become a "boulevard" until March of 1937.

The original Coca-Cola plant was constructed at a cost of \$65,000. The two story brick building, which faced El Cajon Avenue, had the bottling equipment on the first floor and the syrup making and mixing equipment on the second floor. There was also a garage in the rear. A series of remodeling efforts turned the plant so that the bottling facility was on the west side and a two story structure had parking on the roof. The latter was added as it became necessary to expand to meet the needs of a thirsty San Diego. The old Coca-Cola site was leveled and is now occupied by a Pep Boys store and multi-family dwellings.

The 7-Up building now stands vacant. It was most recently occupied by San Diego Stage and Lighting. It had also housed a photo processing plant and a general merchandise store after 7-Up moved to larger facilities.

The 7-Up plant was a kid's paradise. It had large windows on the El Cajon Boulevard side that provided viewing of the production line. Green glass bottles marched along the line like soldiers as they went through the bottling process. As a kid, it was fun to watch and there was always that hope that a bottle would fall off the line or something would squirt 7-Up all over the place. It just didn't seem to happen. If you stood in front long enough, you were assured of a free sample.

The Coca-Cola plant faced Wilson Avenue in the 50s and was more difficult when it came to free samples. But, when there are kids there are ways. Standing outside a window and repeatedly wiping sweat from one's brow, even on a cold day, seemed to work pretty well.

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that glass bottles were not recycled by grinding them up and making other things out of the byproducts. Soda bottles were redeemed. Each bottle required a deposit when it was purchased. The deposit was refunded when the bottle was returned. It amounted to big money. Small bottles were 3 cents and large bottles were a nickel. When you purchased sodas you brought back your empties for an

even exchange on the deposit. It was a great system, especially for enterprising kids who collected soda bottles and returned them for the deposit money.

My first non-yard keeping job was in a small store on University Avenue where I sorted the returned bottles. Each bottle had to go back to the proper vendor and customers brought them in and plunked them down in a bin. It was my task to unload the bin and sort the bottles. Between the soda remnants and the beer residue, the bottles were sticky and they smelled. You sure got to know your sodas. Coca-Cola bottles went in cases by the door. 7-Up's dark green bottles went next to the big stack of canned goods. Then there were Hires and Nehi and Cliquot Club and Squirt, Pepsi, Dad's, Suncrest and the list went on and on. But I didn't care - I got 50 cents plus a soda and candy every other day for sorting the bottles.

Once the bottles were picked up by the delivery trucks, they were taken to the plant and inspected and washed. They were inspected again to make sure that there were no chips on the top that would cut someone or prevent the bottle cap from sealing and then they fell into the queue of "soldier" bottles waiting to march through the machine that would fill them with their refreshing liquid, place a cap on them, and then send them on their way to the salivating public.

Sodas were always a dilemma. There were so many flavors and different sized bottles. The 8 oz. bottle was a waste of time, the 12 oz. bottle was great, but then the 16 oz. bottle appeared. Kids could make many more offending noises with a 16 oz. bottle so they became the drink de jour regardless of the flavor. As cans made their appearances and bottlers had to supply regular and diet sodas with new flavors and names to an increasing population, El Cajon Boulevard could no longer provide the space for these growing businesses. Those good neighbor businesses were forced to move to much larger and efficient facilities.

Did it bother me? Not really for I am a Pepsi man. For many years the Pepsi-Cola bottling plant was located in my grandfather's old woodworking mill at 1858 Newton Avenue in Logan Heights. During the early years, my dad would often stop by and always came home with free Pepsi. Now that was a pause that refreshed.



The Coca-Cola building at 3550 El Cajon Boulevard (*San Diego Union*, March 13, 1930)