

# The Big Steer

*Milwaukee's Largest Bovine*

Text and Photography: Mark Bertieri

**The "Big Steer" is located** behind The Rafters Steakhouse on S. 27th St. in Oak Creek (Milwaukee), WI. From the road the fiberglass statue built by Sculptured Advertising of Sparta, WI (serial no. 341), hard to believe is not visible. I just happened to drive around the back and there it was in all of its glory.

The story begins with the Dimiceli family who opened their first family restaurant in the 1930's, in the early 1960's Joseph Dimiceli purchased a motel "The Chez Paris" (known to rent by the hour vs. the day) looking to remodel the facility into a restaurant and banquet hall. After various additions over the years during a remodeling in late 1985 a major fire burned down all of the previous additions (timber framing and lack of water to extinguish it) but only gutted the motel portion (cinder block construction).



The decision was made to re-build and rather than lose his current employees he purchased with a partner the recently closed Black Steer Restaurant on Hwy 100 and Greenfield Ave. At the time, the Black Steer Restaurant chain was known for having a big fiberglass steer as a type of trademark in front of each of their restaurants. Unfortunately they took it with them when they closed. As a way to draw traffic to his new restaurant "Rafters West" until the original was rebuilt, Joseph decided to replace the old "Big Steer" with a similar one of his own.

In 1986-87 when the original Rafters remodeling was complete, he split from his partner and took the "Big Steer" with him. In general the colors of the structure have remained the same except for the bib. It has been many colors, including the Green Bay Packers green and gold over the years. After 9-11 they painted the bib as an American Flag and it has stayed that way since.