

Jell-O Museum Exit 47 Billboard



First I want to acknowledge the folks that have made it possible for us to keep the LeRoy billboard on the Thruway. Without our partners, it couldn't happen. D&R Depot Restaurant, Genesee County Chamber of Commerce, LeRoy Business Council, LeRoy Subway, LeRoy McDonalds, and Kraft Foods- Jell-O. Finding the money to pay for a billboard is difficult, but when you have great partners, its possible. I don't remember when we contracted for our first billboard - - maybe ten years ago. I knew that we needed a billboard to encourage people to get off Exit 47 to visit the Jell-O Museum. The Federal Government controls what signs can go on the NYS Thruway because it is a federal highway. There are very strict rules. I discovered this when I was researching how to get signage for Exit 47. I wanted folks to know that there were campgrounds and fast food and the Jell-O Museum at Exit 47. But I discovered that because Exit 47 of Interstate 90 is an exit to Interstate 490, (Interstate to Interstate) we cannot have signs. In fact, Rochester is in a difficult situation, because all of their exits - -45 -46 - 47 are Interstate to Interstate so you will not find any signs on the Thruway that tells you anything about getting off at those exits. (Next time you're on the Thruway, watch for those kind of signs. Batavia exit 48 has several .) And as an

other interesting note, perhaps you have read about Governor Cuomo's battle with the Feds about the new signs he has had installed along the Thruway advertising NYS history, food, and nature. There are two sets of five between LeRoy and Batavia, and according to the Feds, they are illegal. I'm sure the company that made the signs, and the people who put up the signs and the lawyers who will defend Cuomo's decision are making money.

Anyway - - it took me several months to get in contact with the company that owned the first billboard that I wanted to use. At one time it had an ad for Wyoming Gaslight Village and Christmas Shop. Then it had an insurance sign. But it had been neglected for several years and it was in bad condition. When I finally got in contact with the billboard company, they told me that because the sign was an "unusual size" it might cost more. To make that story short - -we finally signed the contract for the billboard - - about \$8000 a year. The plan was to have several partners who would pitch in about \$75 a month. That's pretty cheap for advertising that reaches thousands of people. Sean at the Depot Restaurant was the first to jump on board. He knew that if we can get people off the Thruway, south on 19 - right past the Depot and then left down Main Street to the Jell-O Museum, he

would get business. And so did Louis Buono at the LeRoy McDonalds. The folks at Subway, understood, and even though the traffic doesn't go by them, people are looking for other types of fast food. LeRoy Business Council understood the need to get folks off at Exit 47 too, so they have been a partner since the beginning. Then, the Genesee County Chamber of Commerce said that, they would match two of our partners, and they became a double partner on the billboard. And when I went to Jell-O to get permission to use their trademark, they became a triple partner. So there are ten of us, keeping Exit 47 and the Jell-O Museum on the Thruway.

We know the billboard works. The year that it was put up, the sign wasn't even complete and we had folks stopping by to say they saw the billboard. A couple of years ago, the old billboard blew over. We had a drop in visitors for five months until we could get a new one up. The new one can only be seen as you travel east between Batavia and LeRoy. It's lit at night, and has a very simple design because people can't read a lot of text as they travel at 75 miles an hour.

We have a small sign above the counter at the Jell-O Gallery: "Tell us if you saw the Jell-O billboard on the Thruway." Folks say - "We've seen that sign every time we go to

Buffalo - -or Niagara Falls - -and we finally decided to stop." "We saw the sign and wondered what a Jell-O Museum would be about." "We were on our way to Boston, and figured it would be a great break to get off the Interstate and see the Jell-O Museum. Where do you suggest we have lunch. " So although there are only a few of us who pay for the billboard, many businesses in LeRoy reap the benefit.

In 1965, at the urging of President Lyndon Johnson's wife, Ladybird Johnson, the "Highway Beautification Act" was signed into law. It limited billboards on federal highways and required each state to set standards for the size, lighting and spacing of billboards. States risk losing 10% of their federal highway money if they do not maintain control of billboards. Four states prohibit billboards - Vermont, Maine, Hawaii and Alaska. Just an interesting note - when Henry Ford was arrested for speeding in LeRoy, he claimed that the size of the letters on the speed signs in LeRoy were too small. When that didn't work, he had two billboards erected in LeRoy warning drivers that LeRoy was a tourist speed trap. The signs were mysteriously taken down, but he had them put up again. It would be almost a year before the issue was settled, and the signs were removed.