



# Soda jerk

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Soda jerk passing ice cream soda between two soda fountains in 1936.

A **soda jerk** (or **soda jerker**<sup>[1]</sup>) was a person — typically a [youth](#) — who operated the [soda fountain](#) in a [drugstore](#), often for the purpose of preparing and serving [ice cream soda](#).<sup>[2]</sup> This was made by putting [flavored syrup](#) into a specially designed tall glass, adding [carbonated water](#) and, finally, one or two scoops of [ice cream](#). The result was served with a long-handled spoon, most commonly known as a "soda spoon", and straws. The name soda jerk came from the

jerking action the server would use on the soda fountain handle when adding the soda water,<sup>[3]</sup> and not the temperament of the server. (cf. [jerk](#))

The position was highly coveted, and awarded only after several months or years of menial labour in the store.<sup>[4]</sup> Some modern [theme diners](#) are styled after establishments from the 1950s and include an actual soda jerk, along with standard [jukeboxes](#) and booth seating. [Michael Karl Witzel](#), writing in *The American Drive-In Restaurant* (2002) describes the archetypal soda jerk as being "[a] consummate showman, innovator and freelance linguist...the pop culture star of the [Gilded Age](#)".<sup>[4]</sup>

The practice of operating a soda fountain in a drugstore reached its peak popularity in the 1940s, and few drugstores today still feature them. However, some drug stores, usually in small rural towns, still do. The proliferation of [ice cream parlors](#) declined as [drive-ins](#) and walk-up [fast food](#) stands grew in popularity, replacing the soda jerk with grill men and [fry cooks](#).<sup>[4]</sup>