

Off the Beaten Patch: Oy!! Do We Need a Kosher Deli in Walnut Creek!

Hot pastrami on rye, matzo ball soup and rugelach to go, where are you?

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Frigid winters. Hideous humidity. Potholes.

I was all too anxious to leave these behind when I moved from Chicago to Walnut Creek in 1982. But no one told me I'd have to give up matzo ball soup, kosher rye and dill pickles. It's the food I know, the food I grew up on.

You have to understand that food -- either eating it or talking about it -- is the Mother Ship of my people. And it has been since Moses packed the matzo and led the tribe out of Egypt. I was absolutely delighted when on my second day at my new job, a co-worker asked if I wanted to grab a sandwich at the local deli. I was out of my chair and out the door before she even finished her sentence.

"What can I get you?" the man behind the counter asked. "What can I get you?" he asked again. I just stood there and didn't say a word. My colleague looked at me, probably thinking, who did we hire all the way from Chicago? She gave her order: a bologna, ham and cheese sandwich on white bread with lettuce, peppers and mayonnaise. I cringed, bought a bag of chips, a Diet Coke and went back to the office. That was the last time I went to lunch with her and the first time I realized that maybe moving here was a mistake.

So here I sit, 28 years later and still no Kosher-style deli in Walnut Creek.

My last boss always said, "Don't come to me with a problem unless you bring a solution." Well, OK. 1403 Locust St. That's the solution. What used to be Chili's Restaurant is sitting empty and is the ideal location to part the Red Sea and open a deli.

If the owner of Manny's in Chicago, Chompie's in Scottsdale or the Carnegie Deli in New York is reading this, please hear my prayer. Not only do I have the location for you, I even have the menu ready. Of course, the menu is almost as long as the Union Prayer Book and will include a page of nut-free and gluten-free offerings, but here's a sample to nosh on:

Appetizers:

- Knishes (potato, meat or spinach)
- Chopped liver
- Smoked fish

Soups:

- Chicken soup with one or all of the following: matzo balls, rice, kreplach or noodles
- Russian cabbage

Sides:

- Kugel
- Cole slaw

Salads:

- Doesn't matter as long as the dressing's on the side.

Sandwiches:

- Hot corned beef
- Hot pastrami
- Tuna or egg salad
- Skirt steak

Brunch:

- Lox and bagels
- Cheese blintzes

Desserts:

- Black & white cookies
- Sundaes
- Rugelach (at least six varieties)
- Kichel
- Babka (yeah, just like on Seinfeld)
- Macaroons (plain and chocolate covered)
- Marble cake
- Hamentashen (poppy seed and apricot)
- Danish (poppy seed, prune and cheese)
- Chocolate kokosh
- Mandel bread (cinnamon without nuts)

There. Problem solved.

The 5700-square-foot size is absolutely perfect. What's more, it's downtown, on a corner and between two parking garages. "Seek and Ye Shall Find." Well, I did.

Inside? Just make sure you have a big lobby, lots of booths, a private back room and the all-important enormous-take-away-dessert-display near the door so, after we say, "Oy, I can't eat another thing," we can buy some halvah on the way out.

Throw in some Early Bird Specials for Rossmoor and a Jewish Singles Night for me and, finally, I may call Walnut Creek home.