

# Mayers family shares slice of New York with Austin

By Tonyia Cone

Special to The Jewish Outlook

When Aaron Mayers' father told him he always wanted to own a deli, Mayers thought he was joking. At the time, Mayers, who holds a degree in architecture, had just sold his office furniture store and was unsure what his next step would be. When he realized his dad was serious, along with Mayers' wife and mom, they designed Manny Hattan's to be Austin's Jewish deli.

The family opened the New York delicatessen and restaurant in North Austin, Mayers said, because they missed foods they grew up with, like knish, matzah ball soup, kugel and traditional Jewish deli foods. Mayers' father was raised in Brooklyn and his mom is from Queens.

Mayers spent time in Rockland County, N.Y., before moving to Austin about 20 years ago by way of Cleveland and Boston.

Here, they had a hard time finding the kind of deli items they were used to eating.

"We decided to fill that void," he said. "We wanted a great sandwich that didn't exist."

To learn the business, Mayers contacted the Second Avenue and Carnegie delis in New York City. Asking if they would show him the ropes in exchange for a few weeks worth of free work behind the counter, he toured the Carnegie Deli's plant in New Jersey to see how they make their pastramis and cheesecakes and learned about the Second Avenue Deli's

suppliers for breads and smoked fish.

"They were awfully gracious, both of them," he said. "They'd been around 40 or 50 years. Some yutz in Austin was not a threat to them."

When Mayers returned to Austin, he figured out when it was best to buy products from other suppliers. He could not find top-quality products elsewhere, so he ships in some things, such as cheesecakes from the Carnegie Deli and bagels from H&H Bagels in New York City.

He also tried to recreate the atmosphere of a New York Jewish deli and built the rest of the menu with his mother's recipes for items including kreplach, chopped liver and kugel. Products not flown in from the Northeast are made by hand, generally

on a daily basis, and some items

on the menu reflect a Texan influence, like "NY Pigs in a Texas Blanket," which are hot dogs wrapped in a tortilla.

Since Manny Hattan's opened in 2002, Mayers estimated,

15-20 percent of its customers are Jewish, although that

number is probably higher on Christmas, the restaurant's busiest day of the year. Eating foods like matzah ball soup, kugel and latkes remind many customers of their grandmothers, he said.

Mayers said it is an important part of their business and family to support the Jewish community as well. Manny Hattan's has sponsored Spotlight on the Arts and made donations to events at the Jewish Community Association of Austin and local synagogues. The restaurant



Aaron Mayers in front of the counter at his family's Manny Hattan's, a North Austin deli whose menu offers cheesecake and bagels shipped in from New City, recipes from his mother, usual deli selections and even some items with a Texas influence — all served in a New York atmosphere.

also donates or provides food at cost for programs, including silent auctions, the JCAA's Young Adult Division Yom Kippur Break Fast and Jewish War Veterans events.

Mayers, along with his wife and children, belong to Temple Beth Shalom, and his children attend the JCAA's Early Childhood Program. Over Chanukah, Mayers spoke to his son's class about the holiday and gave them dreidels, jelly doughnuts and, of course, latkes.

While Mayers said it can be challenging to persuade skeptics to give a Jewish deli in Austin a shot, Manny Hattan's has enjoyed success so far, and the family plans to expand the business.

"I have to pay attention to quality because I'm always going to be scrutinized,"

he said, "but the product speaks for itself."

The Mayers family would like to open more Manny Hattan's locations, possibly downtown or farther north of Austin, and increase catering, especially for life-cycle events. Although customers from other Texas cities have said they would like to have a Manny Hattan's, Mayers said, he would rather open more locations in town than kill the personality their family's ownership brings to the restaurant.

"I relish the role," he said. "It's a fun place to be, to be Manny Hattan."

— — —  
Tonyia Cone, an Austin-based freelance journalist, regularly contributes to The Jewish Outlook. Contact her at [tonyia76@gmail.com](mailto:tonyia76@gmail.com) or visit the Web site [www.tonyiacone.com](http://www.tonyiacone.com).

## Karavel

comfort center

ecco

new balance shop

MEPHISTO  
AUSTIN

Shoe Styles

Wellness Center

"Comfort never looked so good."

5525 Burnet Rd. • Austin, TX 78756 • (512) 459-7603  
Mon-Fri 9:30-6, Sat 9:30-5 • [www.karavelshoes.com](http://www.karavelshoes.com)

Congregation Beth Israel Sisterhood Judaica Shop

## L'dor V'dor

Your Central Texas Source for Judaica



Menorot • Mezuzot • Tallitot • Ritual Items • New Baby Gifts • Wedding Gifts  
Bar/Bat Mitzvah Gifts • Handmade Greeting Cards • Jewelry • Music • Books

3901 Shoal Creek Blvd • Austin, TX 78756 • 459-9777