

Filling The Freezers

Brian's Foods brings Jerusalem Pizza's kosher calzones to markets.

Shelli Liebman Dorfman
Contributing Writer

The man behind the smiling face on new packaging in area frozen food cases has good reason to be happy.

Expanding on the popularity of his kosher calzones, Jerusalem Pizza owner Brian Jacobs, along with business partner and entrepreneur Steve Katz, has begun production and outside sales of the frozen version of the meal entree under the name Brian's Foods (www.briansfoods.com).

The new business is separate from Jacobs' Jerusalem Pizza in Southfield and Jerusalem Bistro in West Bloomfield.

"But it is closely related," Jacobs said. "Recipes are derived from Jerusalem Pizza's recipes and are currently made and packaged in Jerusalem Pizza in Southfield."

Brian's All Natural Gourmet Calzones launched June 1 at Busch's Fresh Food Market in West Bloomfield with an order of two cases of each of their five flavors. Five weeks later, the frozen, fully baked calzones were being sold at 11 area Busch's stores as well as 8 Mile Foodland in Southfield, Heartland Market in Farmington Hills, Holiday Market in Royal Oak, Johnny Pomodoro's in Farmington Hills, Market Fresh in Beverly Hills and Market Square in West Bloomfield.

Priced from \$4.99 to \$6.99, the kosher vegetarian calzones are packaged in a microwaveable and oven-usable flow-wrap material inside a freezer-grade box to retain freshness.

The flavors include Classic Pizza, Supreme Pizza, Cheese Lovers, Mushroom Medley, and Potato and Cheese.

All are certified OU-dairy and are supervised in conjunction with the Council of Orthodox Rabbis of Greater Detroit, certified vegetarian through the American Vegetarian Association, contain non-GMO ingredients and are certified Real Cheese with the Real Seal organization.

"Even though they are not labeled *cholov Yisrael* (dairy with special kashrut supervision), they are currently cholov Yisrael because they are baked at Jerusalem Pizza," Katz said.

Secret Ingredient

Plans to create Brian's Foods began during a casual fact-finding meeting between Jacobs and Katz at the Southfield Jerusalem Pizza.

"I asked Brian his objectives and he said efficiency in his restaurant and catering operations, and franchising," said Katz, who assists startup companies and consults with estab-

lished businesses looking to advance. During the meeting, customers from Chicago, Miami and Boca Raton happened into the store and commented there were no restaurants like Jerusalem Pizza in their cities.

"I mentioned to Brian that I felt the franchise route would be difficult because, despite some very good and dedicated employees, Brian and [wife] Rivka are the secret ingredients of Jerusalem Pizza and any attempt to expand would need to infuse that element into it to be successful.

"We needed a way to get the product to more locations without the need to have our secret ingredient, the Jacobs duo, present at each place," Katz said. "We needed to put Jerusalem Pizza products in the freezer section of every grocery store across the country."

Over the next two years, they created Brian's Foods, accepting guidance from others in the food industry.

"One of the best resources was Micah Loucks at the Michigan State University Product Center," Jacobs said. "He connected us with resources to help in every aspect of the project. He brought us to the Making It in Michigan show in Lansing last November where we met Jack Aronson of Garden Fresh, who was very complimentary and helpful. We also met representatives from many grocery chains we now are developing relations with including Kroger, Meijer, Busch's, Sam's Club and others."

The Hiller's Connection

"An early booster was John Woodgate at Hiller's Markets," Katz said. "He gave us our first chance by allowing us to put our products into all Hiller's stores. We were scheduled to launch there on May 20, 2015. We began producing product for the launch, but learned on May 1 that Kroger was buying Hiller's. This meant our launch was off."

Fortunately, Shirley Rebottaro-Houle at Busch's stepped in and helped us launch instead at Busch's in West Bloomfield."

Brian's Foods also has benefitted from a connection with Forgotten Harvest and their subsidiary Hopeful Harvest in Oak Park.

"Besides being available for warehousing and logistics and as a resource on many levels, they also sponsored a show where we re-established our connection with Busch's grocery store and got great guidance from others in the industry, including Dave Zilko of Garden Fresh," said Katz, Brian's Foods' COO, who oversees day-to-day operations.



Brian Jacobs at a frozen food case filled with his calzones



Steve Katz displays a box of Brian's All Natural Gourmet Calzones at Busch's in West Bloomfield.

"We are grateful to our friends, supporters and backers, including Hebrew Free Loan. Our community is fortunate to have such an organization to help with startups like ours," Katz said. "They provide mentoring and guidance in addition to funding. Their trust in us motivates us and helps us stay focused on the success we know we will be able to achieve."

Jacobs said, "The options to expand Brian's Foods' offerings are endless. Once we create our brand, we can introduce pizza, breadsticks, fries and any other item Jerusalem Pizza currently makes that can be frozen, as well as new recipes. We can also expand our calzone offerings to low-fat, gluten-free and maybe even vegan."

Brian's Foods' motto is "taking great food to a great place."

"We provide the great food and our customers provide the great place, wherever that may be," Katz said. "Brian's Foods wants to expand across the country providing delicious, ready-to-heat-and-eat foods for everyone everywhere, including those keeping strictly kosher, vegetarians and anyone else who wants a quick and easy quality meal." □

Kosher Catering from page 20

Epic Kosher Catering

(855) 543-EPIC (3742)
epicureancateringandevents.com

Shalom Shomer is director of kosher operations for Epicurean Catering & Events. Epic provides meat catering at the West Bloomfield JCC. The dairy division, Milk & Honey, is also based inside the JCC, but has plans to move later this year. In cooperation with the Friendship Circle, Milk & Honey will reopen as a full-service restaurant and culinary training center in the Farber Soul Center, Walnut Lake and Drake roads in West Bloomfield.

Quality Kosher Catering

(248) 352-7758
www.qualitykosher.com

Etta Kohn launched Royal Kosher Catering in Detroit in 1966, and her son Paul continued in the catering business with Quality. The legacy continues under owner Leah Kohn, Paul's widow, and their son, general manager Daniel Kohn. Quality Kosher Catering's exclusive venues are Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield and Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills.

Y2K Kosher Catering

(248) 245-0749
Joseph Kellman owns Y2K Kosher Catering, which is based at Bais Chabad of North Oak Park.

The Vaad also certifies as kosher: Babylon Ethnic Foods in West Bloomfield, Dragonmead Microbrewery in Warren, Oak Park-based businesses Kaplan Cakes, Kookies 4 You and Nachlas Caramels as well as some Slurpees products sold at certain 7-11 stores. For updates, visit www.cordetroit.com or call (248) 559-5005.

Conservative Kosher Certification

Although this report focuses on Orthodox kosher certification, Conservative Rabbi Jason Miller, trained as a kosher supervisor, is the founder and rabbinic director of Kosher Michigan, a certification agency.

Kosher Michigan has certified restaurants, bakeries, stores and hundreds of products. For the complete list, visit www.koshermichigan.com. Miller, a *Jewish News* contributing writer, can be reached at (248) 535-7090.