

Kosher Meals Natural Opening

By JOEL ROTEMAN , Chronicle Staff Writer

What could be more natural than a strictly kosher bakery and a restaurant serving kosher meals in the heart of Squirrel Hill, where the majority of Pittsburgh's Jewish community resides? Strangely enough, until last week Pittsburgh didn't have such a restaurant for the past several years.

What is unique about the new kosher foods and baked goods establishment is that the foods are all natural, unadulterated products. But after all, what could be more natural to a people who have been concerned about the purity of food for thousands of years than to eat natural foods?

Dennis Portnoy, 21, proprietor of the Good Earth natural food store (and only kosher restaurant in town,) explained to The Chronicle, "Just as natural food fans needed a restaurant, so did observant Jews. It has always been in my mind to have a kosher restaurant."

While the bakery is strictly kosher, as certified by Rabbi Charles Weiss who comes in the bakery every morning turns on the pilot light and gives the proper blessing, the restaurant serves only kosher products but does involve Shabbos,

"For the observant," Dennis pointed out, "we would be happy to accept a pre-paid order so that the customer does not have to handle money on Shabbos. Then, he could just come in on Shabbos and eat."

Everything in the restaurant and bakery is kosher, including a special cheese free of rennet, an enzyme from the stomach of a calve used in most cheeses. In the store, he added, everything except three products--some meats, retail cheese and grape juice -- is kosher.

Portnoy, who dropped out of formal schooling at the end of ninth grade, is single but, "married to a business. I am involved in natural food myself. I believe in it. So my goal is getting an education in my business and turning people on to natural foods."

Warming to his subject, Dennis told the Chronicle: "You don't have to be a rabbit to enjoy natural foods. Many people think organic food is tasteless, but actually natural goods are even more tasty. That is why I wanted to open a restaurant -- to introduce people to natural food" He also emphasized that the food is for all age groups.

He noted, "People with full stomachs often continue to eat in our society. I feel that is because the body is still craving missing vitamins and minerals. When one eats natural foods, you are satisfied with less."

Portnoy, whose business is at 2701 Murray Ave. (Morrowfield Apartments) obviously is convinced that natural foods are better for health.

"Nearly all the vegetables sold in this country are dipped in paraffin to keep them fresh-looking. Paraffin has been linked to cancer. There are chemicals in the bread to prevent spoilage which are dangerous.

"Part of the problem is the medical education of doctors in this country. Doctors have no courses in nutrition. Their emphasis is on suppressing symptoms rather than in changing people's habits which could prevent diseases.

"Drugless healing is frowned upon in the United States only. The doctor should also be an educator and tell people about their bodies--what hurts and what helps."

Dennis saved a broadside, not for the medical field, but for the organic food business itself. He feels that much of the organic food businesses are dishonest, unfortunately.



DOING what comes naturally is Dennis Portnoy, shown in his store with Holly Davis.

Charles Cat

