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Kudos to kosher

By **Jessica Scarpati**/ Staff Writer

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Though far from sundown on a recent Friday morning, shopping carts have already begun to clog the aisles of The Butcherie with customers plucking kosher wines, meats and sugary treats from the grocery's packed shelves.

"Shabbat Shalom, ma nishma?" High Street resident Shimshon Shmuel greets a fellow shopper - a Hebrew blessing for the Jewish holy day along with the equivalent of "what's up?" - as the two pass through the doors of the kosher food store.

Exiting the store with a purchase of ground beef, Shmuel said he frequents the Coolidge Corner grocery for its array of kosher foods.

"The meat is kosher and I'm Jewish," Shmuel, an Israeli native, said with a shrug.

Leaving with sugar-free kosher cookies, Ruth Solomon also said she favors The Butcherie for its wide selection.

"If you want variety, this is the place to go," said Solomon, a Centre Street resident. "They have the things the other stores don't."

And the fanfare about the Harvard Street grocery isn't a bunch of bupkes.

A recent survey of Boston-area kosher eateries - asking 300 people, about a third from Brookline - voted The Butcherie as "runner-up" for "Best Store/Butcher," second to Gordon & Alperin in Newton Centre.

"The Butcherie is said to have a super selection with a good variety of Israeli foods," according to the first Boston Kosher Community Survey, released last month by Kosher Community Surveys LLC.

Neil Rosenbaum, a Wayland native now living in Maryland, conducted the Internet-based survey from March to April after he said he heard a demand for it from the online Boston Jewish community.

Butcherie co-owner Max Gelerman said he has built customer loyalty with a range of kosher foods - not just meat or bakery items, but a whole mini-market that includes 50 types of wine.

"It's like one-stop shopping," said Gelerman, an Israeli native. "Any kosher food [that] is available, you [can] find in The Butcherie. We give nice service with a smile and the prices are good."

Although no customers the TAB interviewed had anything bad to say about The Butcherie, the survey reports some dissatisfaction.

"Comments were not as positive regarding the quality of meat and frozen goods," the report stated. "Many customers feel that the store is also expensive and needs cleaning."

However, none of the other kosher stores, bakeries and eateries reviewed received totally glowing remarks.

Rami's, which won Best Value in the restaurant category, was heralded as "practically a landmark" where "falafel and schwarma are king."

However, the survey complains of a "small space" where a meal at the Coolidge Corner eatery is "a bit pricey considering its fast-food nature."

Haim Cohen, son of Rami's owner Rahamim Cohen, said complaints about the restaurant's size are common but that he has no plans to expand.

"It's the quality [of the food] that matters, not the size [of the restaurant]," Cohen said.

Washington Square-based Beacon Kosher had more scathing reviews.

"Customers describe the store as expensive, cluttered and dirty," the survey stated. "[One person] summed up their experience as going to the 'Shtetl mart.'"

Still, respondents praised Beacon Kosher for selling meat that is glatt kosher, a stricter standard commonly followed by Orthodox Jews that requires an animal's lungs be free of adhesions.

An owner or manager at Beacon Kosher could not be reached for comment.

Meanwhile, it comes as no surprise to regulars of Cheryl Ann's Bakery that the Chestnut Hill store won first place in the bakery category of the survey.



Rabbi Moshe Bleich of Wellesley and his nephew, Ruvy Rhave, visiting from Israel, shop at the Butcherie on Harvard Avenue. (Kate Flock photo)

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But shoppers the TAB interviewed were more enthusiastic about the challah and pastries than the bakery's adherence to Jewish dietary laws.

"I'm not Jewish. I just love the bakery and the food," said Jim Henry, a Brookline High School teacher in special education who lives in Roslindale.

Co-owner Cheryl Moore said their now-famous challah is sold at five BJ Wholesale Clubs, a number of Shaw's Supermarkets and countless other stores through a distributor who buys 500 loaves a week.






"It's sweeter than most and we use a lot of eggs," Moore said, explaining she and sister Ann began fooling around with a traditional challah recipe 20 years ago. "I even eat it, and I'm not sick of it."

The Boston Kosher Community Survey can be found at kosher-community-surveys.com.

Jessica Scarpati can be reached at jscarpat@cnc.com.

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