

Shapiro's Delicatessen and Cafeteria

www.shapiros.com

Founded: 1905

Location: grocery store, Meridian and McCarty streets, Indianapolis (1905-); restaurant (same location, 1930s-); second location at West 86th Street and Township Line Road (1984-), 918 S. Rangeline Rd., Carmel (2002)

The guiding philosophy of Shapiro's Delicatessen and Cafeteria since 1905 has been: "Cook good, serve generous, price modestly, and people will come."

The Shapiros immigrated to America in 1903, settling in Indianapolis. After raising money through pushcart street sales of flour and sugar, they set up shop at Meridian and McCarty streets, with living quarters above the store for themselves and their eight children. The children were awakened at 3 a.m. each morning.

The grocery featured canned goods stacked in pyramid displays, pickles and mayonnaise, and kosher deli meats. The transition to restaurant began after the end of Prohibition in the mid-'30s, when aging Louis, suffering from back problems, delegated the running of the store to sons Abe, Izzy and Max. They started selling beer for 10 cents per bottle, and before long customers were ordering salami (29 cents) and corned beef (10 cents) sandwiches to go with the brew. That brought about the appearance of tables and chairs. The next thing they knew, the Shapiros were installing a steam table to showcase Rebecca's dinner triumphs, notably her spaghetti and meatballs.

Their timing proved exquisite. The surrounding ethnic neighborhood was giving way to industrial expansion and general migration north, dooming Shapiro's prospects as a full-service grocery but enhancing its reputation as a destination deli. In 1940, Louis formally retired, anointing Izzy to handle the deli counter, Abe, with his award-winning corned beef recipe, to preside over the kitchen, and Max to oversee the whole operation.

Max guided Shapiro's through several expansions, including a kitchen and bakery that could fully accommodate the preparation of its minimum daily requirement of 300 pounds of steam-cooked corned beef briskets; 100 pounds each of pastrami, turkey and roast beef; 150 to 200 loaves of rye bread; and the quartering of 1,000 pickles. During this period, Max kept vacations to a minimum, figuring each day was a schmoozefest with good friends over good eats. Nor did the word "retirement" find its way into his vocabulary; he continued to supervise Shapiro's past his 80th birthday.

His two marriages relatively late in life produced no children, but he ensured continuing Shapiro leadership by enticing his nephew, businessman and investment banker Mort Shapiro, and Mort's son Brian, fresh from law school, to join the firm in 1984. Thus they were in place when Max died suddenly in October 1984. Shortly before, they had convinced Max of the wisdom of opening a second Shapiro's off West 86th Street and Township Line Road on the northwest side, and it was an immediate and lasting success.

Mort, handling books and payroll, and Brian, running day-to-day operations with an uncompromising insistence on quality, saw to it that both locations ran on all cylinders as Indiana's premier and most productive deli operation. Mort's death in 1999 invested

Brian with the full mantle of fourth-generation leadership of Shapiro's, now in its second century of cooking well, serving generously, pricing moderately and watching customers continue to come.