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JERSEY MIKE'S SUBS

BY BRYCE PARKS

If you are coming out of hiding amid the current resurgence of COVID, you may have noticed that the much-anticipated Jersey Mike's Subs has finally opened in Warren Plaza next to Target where Radio Shack use to be (moment of silence, may it rest in peace). So the next time you have to get your Target fix, veer left and try out Dubuque's newest sandwich shop at the same time. You will not be sorry you did.

Jersey Mike's sort of started at the Jersey Shore town of Point Pleasant when CEO, Peter Cancro, started working at a place called Mike's Subs at age 14. He bought the place at 17 on a loan co-signed with his football coach (good call, coach!). In 1987, he added "Jersey" to the name and started franchising, now closing in on 2,000 stores (1,835 exactly) in 49 states (tough break, Alaska). Compare that to about 3,000 Jimmy John's and, get this, 45,000 Subways. So they are comparatively young and growing, but growing fast.

It's brand new, so the interior is obviously clean, fresh, and inviting. Right off the bat, the staff was enthusiastic and friendly. The sub prep area is behind glass but right there in front of you to see, and it looks tasty. Those tomatoes look ripe and not paper-thin. And they, of course, famously slice the meat in front of you when you order.

They claim that they are all about quality as it's the ingredients, high-quality meats and cheese sliced in front of you, store baked bread, and the authentic taste that makes it stand out in the crowd. They kind of have to though, don't they? But the thing is,

they can back it up. We tried it. A lot of it. And it was indeed the real deal.

The signature cold subs are served "Mike's Way" with white onions, lettuce, tomatoes, "The Juice" ("an exquisite splash of red wine vinegar and olive oil blend"), and always finished with spices. You might wonder why you'd want a "wet" sandwich, but hold your judgement until you try it. We think you will be converted. It's a true elevation over the dry sandwich, though taking it "Mike's way" does add over 275 calories and 28 grams of fat to the equation, if you even care about that.

One of the things that sets them aside from other shops is the freshness of the meat. They don't cut a whole bunch meat and just have it sit around till someone orders it; they wait till you order a sandwich and cut the meat fresh right then and there. And there's plenty of it with all the toppings you care to pile on.

There are three bread choices as well: white, wheat, and rosemary Parmesan. We like the classic white the best. The wheat seemed a bit dryer and not as flaky and fresh feeling. The rosemary Parmesan has a Parmesan cheese melted crust on it that flakes off fairly easily and for some, the rosemary flavor may be a bit too overpowering. You make the call. The white is a home run though. We should mention that they have gluten-free buns that they don't make themselves and it shows. They're fairly dry and no one is getting famous off of those.

The main themes of the "original nine" cold subs revolve around salty

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Italian meats and provolone, roast beef and provolone, or bacon and provolone. The Number Four (provolone, prosciuttini, and cappaciuolo) has the best mix of spicy without going too meat heavy. And the #6 (Famous Roast Beef and Provolone) is famous because it is “cooked on the premises using only USDA Choice Top Rounds,” but also because it is super thinly sliced and has exceptional acid balance when getting it “Mike’s Way” (and adding in their homemade pepper relish.)

One fan’s biggest gripe was that people go for their cold subs when the truly best experience that Jersey Mike’s has to offer is the Philly Cheese Steak sandwich. Another real Philadelphia, eater of cheesesteaks claims Jersey Mike’s is still one of his favorites. That’s some high praise. Pat’s and Geno’s may be boiling over with rage right now. We had one for lunch today, and he ain’t lying. It’s quite amazing. And one big sandwich was enough for two of us. They pile the fresh-grilled meat and onions high, and when they’re done, you’ve got a piping hot cheese steak dripping with cheese that’s totally addictive. One fan suggests to “definitely get it with the peppers and onions and extra cheese!”

The *Thrillest* podcast guys say a cheesesteak must possess the Hylian Triforce of elements (It’s a *Legend of Zelda* thing):

1. The roll must be toasty and warm and able to withstand the grease of

- the melted cheese, meat, and onions/peppers without sogging through.
2. The chopped steak must be crispy and tender, without an abundance of the fatty, inedible bits that bounce your teeth back when you bite down.
3. The cheese (Whiz or American) must be of the correct melty consistency to act as a binding agent for the meat, cheese and onions without overwhelming the entire production.

They concluded that the cheesesteak at Jersey Mike’s had all of those elements.

The sandwiches come in three sizes: 5 inch Mini, 7 inch Regular, and 14-15 inch Giant. They also offer wraps, and tubs (that’s a salad version), chips, desserts, and drinks. With quality comes price. Jersey Mike’s Subs is not participating in the race to the bottom for cheapest sandwich on the market and thankfully so. The footlong-ish giant will set you back \$12 to \$14. Minis are around \$6 while regular and wraps hit the \$8 range. The rewards program is pretty good, too. You get 4 to 12 points per sandwich purchased and can redeem free sandwiches with as little as 48 points for a \$6 mini or 144 points for a \$12 giant sub.

We didn’t have the desserts, but we saw a ranking by greatness: 1) Peanut butter KandyKakes. 2) Butterscotch Krimpets. 3) Cupcakes. ■



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