

Amazing Hot Dog: Eatery set to reopen

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Amazing topped with cream cheese.

"What we tell people is that if you remotely like cream cheese, you'll like it," says Eisenbud.

And those are just two of the eyebrow-raising combinations. Take the Hawaii 5-O, an Amazing dipped in teriyaki sauce and topped with crushed pineapple, sesame seeds and scallions. Or the Caped Crusader: an Amazing with chili, cole slaw and jalapeños. Those who don't want a special can order a Classic or an Amazing with any toppings they choose.

"You can customize a hot dog any way you want," says Eisenbud, "or you can take advantage of months of extensive research and have a specialty hot dog."

Eisenbud's original idea was "to be all things to all people." He planned to serve chicken dogs, pork dogs and veggie dogs. Once he realized that was logistically impossible, he and Applebaum decided to stick to one type of hot dog with a variety of toppings. They also offer a veggie burger for the vegetarians who are dragged inside by their carnivorous friends. But don't go asking for a veggie dog.

"We haven't met a veggie hot dog that we're willing to put our name on yet," Eisenbud explains.

The two conducted most of their research online, scouring menus from hot dog joints around the country. They also



Photos by ELIZABETH LARA / Herald News

Matt Applebaum, co-owner of Amazing Hot Dog in Verona, prepares one of the eatery's unusual dogs. The shop is preparing to re-open after a fire.

checked out such North Jersey favorites as Rutt's Hut in Clifton and Libby's in Paterson before renting a commercial kitchen to test their recipes. The partners experimented with new combinations, and Eisenbud created a secret chili recipe. In addition to the usual beef and onions, the recipe calls for bittersweet chocolate, although Eisenbud refuses to reveal much more.

"It's not the only secret ingredient," he says. "There's a whole medley of spices."

The restaurant is the fulfillment of a life-long dream for Eisenbud, a Johnson and Wales culinary school graduate. After working in his family's gasoline and fuel oil business for 20 years, he decided to start a business of his own. The hot dog idea came in early 2005 while watching the PBS show A Hot Dog Program, which was featuring a culinary

school graduate who sells hot dogs out of a lunch truck called Super Duper Weenie in Fairfield, Conn.

"He made his own chili and refused to sell diet soda," Eisenbud says. "I said, 'OK, that'll work.'"

A few weeks later, he posted a request to the eGullet Web site, an online forum devoted to the culinary arts, asking for help naming his hot dog restaurant.

"I'm in the planning stages of opening a hot dog joint ... I turn to you, my esteemed partners in all things culinary to dig deep into your creative centers and excavate the name of my new venture," wrote Eric Eisenbud, known online as "ejebud," on March 8, 2005.

Within minutes, he had a number of enthusiastic responses from food-loving frequenters of the message boards. He kept

them updated on the restaurant's progress, and 10 months later, many of those posters were the first to visit Eisenbud's restaurant, which he finally named Amazing Hot Dog. Since the fire, eGullet members have sent encouraging words his way as well.

It was also in March that Eisenbud and Applebaum formed a business partnership. Their parents had been friends for several years, but the two had never met. Eisenbud ran into Applebaum's father at a coffee shop, and the latter mentioned that he and his son, who was living and working in Manhattan as a trader at the time, had been thinking about opening a hot dog restaurant.

While Applebaum worked in the city, Eisenbud scoured the area looking for a place to rent, with cell phone and camera in hand. After they'd found the spot

on Bloomfield Avenue, they began a six-month process with the zoning board. One of the residents of the neighborhood behind the restaurant voiced concerns about cooking odors.

"I actually applaud the guy for caring enough to come to the board meetings," Eisenbud says.

The partners had to bring in lawyers and experts to convince the neighbors that the restaurant wouldn't make much of a difference in the cooking odors emanating from the building, which already houses a high-end catering company and a bagel shop. Amazing Hot Dog finally was approved by the board in November, and it opened on Jan. 16.

If the restaurant does well, Eisenbud and Applebaum have big plans.

"We've got franchising in mind. We'd like to have at least

three units in five years," says Eisenbud. "We can see this in any college town, food court or airport."

While they're focusing on re-opening their current store for now, the fire gave them the opportunity to drive around the area and look for a spot for their second location. They also made subtle improvements in the restaurant: an automated condiment dispenser, more storage and an upgraded fire alarm system with a heat sensor. And they changed their computer battery backup system, which had caused the problem in the first place.

"How often do you get a chance to start all over again?" Eisenbud asked. "We're ready."

Reach Carolina Bolado at (973) 569-7066 or bolado@northjersey.com.



Co-owner Eric Eisenbud brings an order to the table for, clockwise from the left, Shelby Swayze, Stacey McClutchy, Stephanie Botwick and Jen Holler (with back to camera) in January before the disastrous fire.

Food signs: Personality science

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a book, "What's Your Food Sign? How To Use Food Clues To Find Lasting Love."

"When you meet somebody, you don't know what they're really like. This gives you some perspective," he says, adding that it's important to remember that many people choose foods for health reasons.

"Ask what they like," Hirsch says, "not what they eat."

As founder of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago, Hirsch is best-known for his work with odors — how some turn you on or help you lose weight, while others keep you awake at night.

He's done more than 180 studies on sensory phenomena and disorders and has 80 others in the works.

During one of those projects he found that women crave the mood-boosting chemicals in chocolate during certain times of the month, which got him to wondering whether food preferences reflect other moods or personality traits.

"Everything we do reflects our personality, from our favorite colors to our choice of cars. Food is the same way," Hirsch says. "The question is: Are we smart enough

to figure out what it means?"

With all due respect, it sounded a smidge like a junior-high science-fair project to me, albeit one that spanned 20 years and involved 18,631 people.

Hirsch began by giving people a battery of personality tests, then asked their food preferences. Then he took that data and looked for correlations.

He found clear links between what people ate and how they acted, and at least one finding took him totally by surprise.

"People who liked foods I would consider to be very bland and bland, like vanilla or pretzels, turned out to be the personalities that were the most spicy and craved novelty," he says. "It's almost like, if they have it in their personalities, they don't need to have it in their food."

There were some glitches: Love for chocolate, for example, cuts across all personality types. Hirsch solved that problem by specifying milk or dark and hollow chocolate bunnies or solid ones.

All the test subjects came from the Midwest, Hirsch says, so there could be regional variations.

Then there's the familiarity factor that comes from being married, which all his test participants were,

the better to document the link between food and love.

"The more you're exposed to a food, the more you like it," Hirsch says. "I don't know if our subjects would have had the same preferences if we caught them before they met each other."

When it comes to compatibility, however, things don't always make sense. Pretzel people, for example, who are quirky, fun, lively and energetic, are most compatible with other pretzel lovers, ambitious potato-chip people or cheese-curl fans.

But it turns out that cheese-curl people are most compatible with either potato-chippers or the perfectionist tortilla-chip types.

By the way, if you're ever in trouble, don't bother calling 911. Just find somebody who likes nuts. "They're very dependable," Hirsch says, "especially in emergency situations."

The whole project originally was supposed to have psychiatric applications, but it turned out to be relevant in other realms, like the aforementioned jury selection, and hiring practices.

Hirsch recommends using his findings as a possible screening tool.

TEST YOUR COMPATIBILITY

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You're principled, a rule-follower, intelligent, conscientious, moral and a perfectionist. You can be competitive but also quick to criticize yourself.

Best match: mint chocolate chip

7. Strawberry

You're content to be a follower working behind the scenes. You like being part of a team.

Best match: rocky road, vanilla, mint chocolate chip or other strawberries

8. Coffee

You're lively, dramatic, seductive and flirtatious and live life with gusto. You throw yourself headfirst into everything and prefer to live in the moment rather than think about the future.

Best match: strawberry

9. Mint chocolate chip

You're a cynic — ambitious, argumentative and contrary. You're frugal and cautious about planning the future.

Best match: other mint chocolate chips

10. Rocky road

You're charming and engaging in social situations, but driven at work. You can lose your temper over life's inconveniences, particularly waiting in line.

Best match: other rocky roads

In the produce aisle

■ Find out what your food choices reveal about your personality. Pick which of the two choices you prefer:

1. (A) lemons

(B) oranges

2. (A) potatoes

(B) yams

3. (A) grapefruit

(B) tangerines

If you picked A in at least two out of three, you're a quiet, reserved, contemplative person who tends to think before you leap. You're the opposite of impulsive. If you chose B in at least two out of three, you're probably outgoing, a person others might call an extrovert. But you'd like to enjoy a stable relationship.

— From "What's Your Food Sign?," by Alan Hirsch

Crabby season

Food Network Kitchens

Soft-shell crabs are coming into season, and we're excited. Soft shells aren't a specific species of crab, though blue crabs are most commonly eaten.

All crabs molt their shells on a regular basis when they grow too large for them, and, if caught within a four-hour span of having molted, they're soft and tender and can be eaten without any of the work of shelling.

Always buy live soft-shells, ideally ones that seem feisty. Once you get them home, cut off the small trapezoidal protrusion from the front end of the shell (that's the face), then flip the crab over and cut off the "apron" — the hard shell-colored semicircle near the tail.

At this point, the crab can be cooked any way you'd like; we're partial to the lightest-possible dusting of flour, salt and pepper, then a quick pan-fry.

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