



## CORNED BEEF SANDWICH

at The Corned Beef Factory 1009 W. Lake St. 312-666-2635

### WORTH A TRIP

**By Michael Nagrant** | FOR REDEYE  
Manny's corned beef is just not that good. And listen, I love Manny's Deli. I appreciate that the Raskin family has kept the venerable joint going, that's they've provided a feeding/meeting trough for presidents and aldermen. Knife- and plate-flipping counterman Gino Gambarota is one of greatest restaurant personalities we have, the short ribs are heaven and they stock Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray soda. But their legendary machine-sliced corned beef is often dry. What I really go to Manny's for is the pastrami and the nostalgia.

So where does a guy go for truly a heavenly helping of pickled brisket in Chicago? The answer, my friends, is The Corned Beef Factory sandwich shop in the West Loop, located in what was once the front office of the 60-plus year old Ex-Cel corned beef factory, an old-school meatpacking district staple that used to sell wholesale briskets out

the back door to Chicago's amateur barbecue enthusiasts. Located under the Lake Street elevated tracks, the low rumble of trains follows you inside.

There, you'll find Cleo in her pristine white butcher's coat, scrawling orders by hand and whooping it up with the regulars. The menu is handwritten on a torn piece of old butcher paper, and the walls are lined with worn dark wood; in the corner, there's a vintage warehouse cart and a wall-mounted face of an old Toledo butcher's scale. The only thing missing are dudes in newsboy caps or greasy guys in overalls clutching metal lunch pails.

Though it's only been open since January, The Corned Beef Factory, which represents the essence of Depression-era chic, feels like it's been operating for generations. The experience is so well-curated here, all the way down to the sandwiches wrapped in boxes

tied shut with butcher twine and hand-labeled red cardboard tags with your name on them, that I assumed the restaurant was dreamed up by a cabal of interior designers. But, as the manager told me, "Nah, we did it all ourselves. We wanted it to look like an old butcher shop."

Like old-school butchers, the guys working the counter and the cash register are no-nonsense folks who let Cleo do all the talking. The restaurant's manager declined to give his name when I interviewed him, because as he said, "We'd like to let the sandwiches speak for themselves." Their handiwork does speak volumes. Fluffy, soft rye bread baked locally and stuffed with about four inches of gossamer slices of garlicky, super-moist corned beef (\$10) is the best I've tried in the city. They throw a slice of swiss cheese on the sandwich and a hefty portion of housemade potato chips in the box for good measure. A

lot of corned beef served in local restaurants comes from third-party wholesalers such as Vienna Beef in Chicago or Sy Ginsberg from United Meats in Detroit; here, it's made right in back and you can't get much fresher than that.

The restaurant is not a one-trick pony: Their Italian beef (\$9), overflowing with lean shaved beef topped with peppery gravy and a vinegary spicy giardiniera, is as good as the beefs served at the legendary A's. All that savory meat begs for a good dessert, and the fried-to-order honey puffs (\$2 for 4) — delectable, honey-drizzled doughnut that puffs steam with each bite — do the trick. Once they get a whiff, I expect the aldermen won't be far behind.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.

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