

# Corona del Mar Residents Association

A voice for everyone who calls 92625 their home!



## COLUMN: GETTING TO KNOW CORONA DEL MAR BUSINESSES

By Bruce Carlin, CdMRA Member

### Gary's Deli



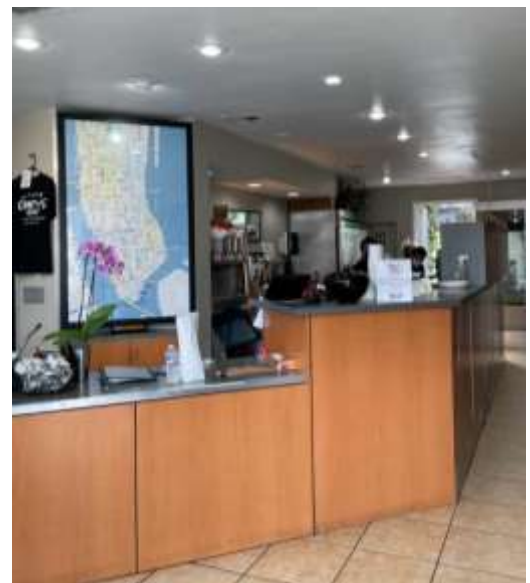
A deli in Corona del Mar? A deli in Orange County? Not so many.

To those of us who crave that kind of old-fashioned, comfortable, look-you-in-the-eye delicatessen food and service, it's not as common here in the OC as LA's west side, for example. The word delicatessen, per Webster, is defined as "ready-to-eat food products (such as cooked meats and prepared salads)." Webster really misses the mark with this clinical definition. A delicatessen, to customers, is food prepared and served with love, prepared in a caring way, always thinking about the customer.

Enter Gary's Deli. Since 1976 (some say earlier but we'll leave that to historians), this small deli (which originally was an ice cream parlor) has been preparing food that's delicious and brings a bit of New York to the table or takeout counter. With foods prepared daily, such as turkeys prepared in their oversized oven, to brisket, to corned beef, to naughty cookie treats like black and white cookies flown in from New York, Gary's offers that New York vibe in a beach resort setting.

When I sat down with Denise Risdon, daughter of still-working mom Adrienne Dolinka, the founder, it was clear why this deli has been successful for almost 50 years. They love their customers. They care about their customers in the smallest ways, such as providing Q-tips for customers to use to push the credit card keypad buttons during the height of the pandemic, to the little doggy bags of turkey scraps prepared by Denise (the "Dog Fairy") to keep her customers' canine family happy and feeling welcome.

Deli's have been in their family for years; Denise's grandfather owned several deli's in New York's Times Square during the 50's and 60's. Denise remembers her childhood watching "Aunt Rose" standing at the checkout counter, with 6 black manual dial phones all ringing at once for takeout orders, answered in order where she dutifully took down the order to be sure all was correct.



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The service tradition has been passed down and re-interpreted at Gary's Deli to adjust to Corona del Mar's and Orange County's preferences. Re-interpretations such as best-selling Fresh Banana Shakes – the beachy add-on to classic deli menu items. Their top-selling item is "The New Yorker", a standout sandwich of fresh rye bread, Swiss cheese, homemade thousand island, coleslaw, and the customer's choice of meat – pastrami, fresh roasted turkey, lean corned beef, or brisket. Matzo ball soup is also a favorite – they sell "huge quantities." It is food made with love.



Local families have been coming here for years. Back in the 70's, they had grade schoolers come to the deli unaccompanied after school for a snack, and Adrienne and Denise have watched these kids grow up, marry, have families, and now bring their own kids into Gary's for a shake or a sandwich. Locals appreciate the food but also the staff, many there for years like sandwich guru Guillermo, 35 years. Denise knows her regulars, either by name or what they order, and all feel a warm welcome. Many of our famous Newport Beach residents love Gary's and frequent the store either in person or by delivery. On the other end of the spectrum, if someone has been down on their luck, Denise has been known to take care of them as well. She considers the community her family, and it shows.

Gary's also does catering, and there are some interesting stories around that. They cater parties of course, but there is more. Because Gary's has been around so long and been such an important part of one family's lives, they come in each year on the anniversary of the death of their loved one who enjoyed Gary's so much. They buy a sandwich, take it to the ocean where their loved one was honored, and toss the sandwich into the sea in remembrance.

They recently introduced breakfast items, and as I was leaving the store, I heard a customer sitting outside talking with another customer, saying "have you tried the breakfast burrito? It's amazing." Gary's has a bright and happy dining patio behind the store, expanded with more tables, plants and flowers to accommodate customers' needs during the pandemic. They also started VIP online ordering or delivery through Door Dash recently and will continue offering it as it's been very popular with customers.

When I finished my interview with Denise, like any warm and welcoming great deli, she wouldn't let me leave without having "a little something to eat." I resisted, but it didn't work. The avocado toast and coffee were amazing.

**Gary's Deli \* 3309 East Coast Hwy \* Corona Del Mar**