

# You Can't Keep a Good Pastrami Down

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Summer 2011; *Distinctly Montana*

<http://www.distinctlymontana.com/article/starkys-authentic-american>



It's Friday night at Starky's Authentic Americana in Bozeman, and the crowd is as varied as the food. Everyone is smiling, enjoying their meals and the vibe. A couple sips a red wine after ordering steak. A family finishes their burgers and Dr. Brown's Sodas, and a group of university students share a bucket of Bozone Select.

"That's the fun of Starky's at this point; it can be all those things at once," said Dan Good, the restaurant's General Manager.

Owners Glen and Kathy Stark first opened Starky's as a small lunch venue in 2004. It was a New York-style deli offering handcrafted pastrami and corned beef sandwiches and other ethnic specialties. Over the past two years, the Starks reinvented the deli, broadening its menu to include dinner and Sunday brunch as well as the original favorites.

The "Americana" theme merges regionally-inspired cuisine with the Starks' well-known passion for fresh-ingredient food. Kathy and Glen pride themselves on making everything from scratch: bread, bagels, corned beef, sauces, soup stock, pastries. All of it. "Everything has to be babied, really watched," Kathy said.

The new menu was inspired by the question: When you grow up in a certain region, what do you crave? "We tried to capture a road trip—East to West, North to South," Kathy explained. Glen added that they want the food to provide an immediate personal connection. "There's such an emotional tie between food and memories," he said.

## "What is matt-zo?"

The couple regards the restaurant as a personal "leap of faith." Originally from Detroit, Glen and Kathy fell in love with Bozeman after vacationing in the area. They began brainstorming ways they could pull off moving to Montana. Their new friend Mike Art, owner of Chico Hot Springs, told them Bozeman needed a deli.

Both Glen and Kathy grew up eating great delicatessen food, but becoming restaurant owners had never crossed their minds in the past. Yet, in 2003, along with their son and daughter, they moved across the country to do just that. Launching the deli, the couple drew on Kathy's experience as a food writer and connections with several certified master chefs and Glen's background in finance.

They were stunned at the number of customers when they opened. Locals inquired repeatedly about ch-hallah and matt-zo and asked what was in a latke. The Starks helped with pronunciation and made adjustments to the menu; call it a "Potato Latke" and describe it as a potato pancake, and suddenly latkes sell quite well. They added a club

sandwich as a familiar-feeling option too. Glen laughed and said, “A Jewish deli isn’t going to have that; it has bacon in it!”

The deli was not technically kosher, but it offered many kosher-style sandwiches. Regardless, customers were soon asking for matzoh ball soup simply because it was really good soup. East Coast transplants became regulars claiming the pastrami was exactly as they remembered it.

Locals got to know Starky’s for handcrafted sandwiches on fresh bread, each one with a name as homemade as the ingredients. As Starky’s established its reputation for artisanal sandwiches, the little deli experienced steady growth.

### **Inventing Plan C**

Everything stopped on March 5, 2009 when a natural gas explosion devastated several businesses in downtown Bozeman. The beloved sandwich shop was completely destroyed.

Glen smiled ironically and called it “our forced expansion program.”

If they were to make a successful comeback, the Starks needed to re-invent. “We went through those first three months saying, ‘we’re done.’ This was our Plan B, we didn’t have a Plan C,” Kathy said.

The outpouring of community concern persuaded the Starks to carry on. “You make sandwiches for people. You don’t realize how much it means till it’s gone,” Kathy shared. “We couldn’t go two feet without someone asking us, ‘When are you going to open again? We miss you.’”

Recognizing how well their “authentic deli concept” had succeeded, they wondered what might happen if they grew the idea to include other American regional cuisine.

The Americana menu began to evolve. Chicken and waffles and sweet potato fries are great Southern soul food, while the wild garlic shrimp has a southern California flare, and the Starky’s take on steak and fries is as local as you can get. Then there’s the pan seared salmon and the mushroom and asparagus polenta for a Northwest tribute.

With their expanded menu, Glen and Kathy celebrated their re-opening as Starky’s Authentic Americana on April 9, 2010. The new location, a block off Main, has patio dining out front and a more modern look inside. Decisively ready to move on from the tragedy, the Starks showcased all the original lunch favorites, and dinner and Sunday brunch, along with a beer and wine list.

They also feature more local and regional produce and meats. Purple barley in their ancient grain pilaf comes from Timeless Seeds in Eastern Montana. “We pair salmon from Montana Fish Company with (Timeless Seeds) black lentils and locally grown greens from Field Day Farms for a knockout menu item,” Kathy said.

Beer batters are crafted with Bozone Select Amber Ale and chili flavored with a splash of Madison River Salmon Fly Honey Rye. There are meats from Sweet Grass Natural Lamb and Montana’s Best Meats in Whitehall. WayFare Incorporated in Bozeman supplies dairy-free alternatives for the vegetarian and vegan soups. “It’s a relationship

business,” Kathy said. “We enjoy the challenge of creating new menu items or specials using Montana products.”

And then there’s dessert. “I have the most talented pastry chef in the city,” Kathy said of Erin Good, who is responsible for their sweets and baked goods. “Everything she touches is magic.”

### **Much more than comfort food**

Sit in the dining area any lunch hour or evening and, at some point, the comment will simmer up: This is exactly the way my mom made it.

It’s easy to call it “comfort food,” but Kathy shies from the term. It seems to imply “nothing fancy,” and that couldn’t be further from the truth. The Starky’s trademark is a knack for transforming regional standards into true culinary delights. “There’s the element of seeing the familiar food on the menu,” said Kathy. “But we like to push the envelope on being a little different.”

That philosophy resonated with their new head chef, Leander Stenroos, who was previously the head chef at the Old Faithful Inn. “Taking the time and care that they take—that grabbed me,” he said. “You’re not going to go through making seven kinds of bread unless you take pride in your food.”

Working with all fresh ingredients requires a high level of commitment and creativity from the kitchen team. “It increases their pride; you have more respect for the product you’re working with,” Good said.

Stenroos is looking forward to further developing the weekend specials and expanding the Americana menu to include Southwest options and California cuisine. Through it all, he welcomes Glen and Kathy’s continued direct involvement. It comes back to the reason that the Starks moved to Bozeman—they wanted to do something meaningful that fostered real relationships. The menu may evolve, but that core mission remains unchanged.

“They have this strong passion for this place and for the food,” said Stenroos. “It’s a great feeling, to see Glen standing there, smiling, greeting people coming in.”

Meanwhile, a man seated near the bar takes a bite of his sandwich. He can’t help but exclaim, “Now, that’s real pastrami.”

*Anika Hanisch is a freelancer, memoir ghostwriter, and writing coach who lives in Bozeman. She’s discovered that there are two reliable cures for writer’s block: 1) taking the day off to rock climb in Gallatin Canyon and 2) corned beef on rye. Preferably in that order.*

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Menus available at: [\\_www.starkyonline.com/](http://www.starkyonline.com/)