

# 'Deli Man' a mouth-watering film

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"People loved 'Deli Man' — it is literally a mouth-watering film," said Ellen Wedner, director/executive producer of the Donald M. Ephraim Palm Beach Jewish Film Festival, at which the film recently played. "Everyone told me they were hungry after seeing it."

"Deli Man" — a documentary film by director/producer Erik Greenberg Anjou about the Jewish "delicatessen" industry — soon will be opening for wider release, playing at theaters throughout South Florida starting Friday, Feb. 27.

Ronnie Dragoon, CEO and founder of Ben's kosher delicatessens (which has a thriving restaurant in **Boca Raton**), appeared in the film and thinks it will be good for the "deli" industry — about restaurants which feature recipes and culinary garnishes brought by Jews from all over Europe that were introduced to America in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries.

Dragoon said: "The movie should help make people appreciate deli food more. The Jewish deli is an endangered species. We need to let the world know we are still around, though we are doing well. Business in **Boca Raton** is up eight percent and we are thinking of opening stores in both Palm Beach and Aventura."

For Anjou, "Deli Man" is his third feature-length documentary in his trilogy about Jewish culture. The celebrated preceding films are "A Cantor's Tale" and "The Klezmatics — On Holy Ground."

While showing "The Klezmatics" in Houston, Anjou met David "Ziggy" Gruber, an event sponsor. After talking to the charismatic Gruber and doing some research, Anjou soon concluded that Ziggy could be the "lead deli man" in a story about the deli industry.

Anjou said: "After meeting Ziggy, I read David Sax's book, 'Save the Deli.' I learned there are only 150 Jewish delis left in North America. There are now approximately 20 Jewish delis in New York City, when in 1931, there were about 1,500 kosher delis and 150 kosher dairy restaurants. The numbers are staggering."

Anjou, however, knew that to simply make a movie about the deli industry wouldn't be enough. He needed a compelling lead character.

Anjou said: "As a storyteller, Ziggy Gruber is a wonderful character and one of the leaders in keeping the deli business alive today."

Ziggy is a third-generation deli man, like his father, grandfather, uncle and great-uncle before him. Ziggy's grandfather, Max, for example, opened the Rialto Deli, the first deli on Broadway in New York City, in 1927, and Ziggy was stuffing cabbages atop of a crate there when he was only eight years old.

Ziggy's parents, Gene and Pam Gruber, wanted him to stay out of the deli business, however, and enrolled him in Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in London when he was 18.

However, as he recalls in the film, Ziggy's life changed when he went one year with his father to the annual dinner of the Delicatessen Dealers' Association of Greater New York.

Ziggy said: "I looked around the room — it was all sixty- and seventy year-old people. I said to myself: 'Who is going to perpetuate our food if I don't do it?' The next day I went back to my dad and uncle and said, 'I've had enough of this fancy-schmancy business, I'm going back into the delicatessen business.'"

In 1999, Ziggy moved to Houston, Texas to open Kenny & Ziggy's New York Delicatessen Restaurant. Following Ziggy's business life as a "deli man," as well as his struggle to maintain a personal life, are keys to the appeal of this film.

Of course the story of deli isn't Ziggy's alone.

"Deli Man" visits noted meccas of deli such as the Carnegie, Katz's and Second Avenue delis in New York and Canter's in Los Angeles. It also interviews some of the great connoisseurs of deli, such as Jerry Stiller, Fyvush Finkel and Larry King.

The documentary also tours some of the new shining lights in the deli business that are doing innovative things to attract diners, such as Wise Son's in San Francisco and Caplansky's in Toronto.

According to Anjou, whose favorite deli food is the pastrami sandwich, "Jewish culture reflects the heart of a vital ethnic history. As that culture continues to shift and adapt alongside mainstream America, delicatessen food — as its name suggests — remains a beloved communal delicacy. It's more than 160 years of tradition being served up by the Jewish deli owners and operators."

Anjou would love feedback on the film and requests viewers respond on the Comments section of the film's website, <http://www.delimanmovie.com>.

Deli Man opens on Feb. 27 in Aventura (AMC Aventura); **Boca Raton** (Living Room Theaters and Regal Shadowood 16); Coral Gables (Bill Cosford Cinema); **Delray Beach** (Movies at Delray); Fort Lauderdale (The Classic Gateway Theatre); Lake Worth (Movies at Lake Worth); South Miami (AMC Sunset Place) and Tamarac (Last Picture Show).

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