

Pride in family, hometown adds zest to business

Philadelphia owns the cheese steak. Buffalo brags on wings. Indianapolis? If Brent Joseph has his way, his hometown of Indy will gain national fame for its King David Dogs.

Although competition is keen among cities claiming to be titans of hot dogs, pizza and barbecue, Joseph, j'98, has history on his side. For more than 40 years, Indianapolis connoisseurs could buy King David hot dogs, created by his grandfather and great-uncle, in local grocery stores. Today the dogs themselves are identical, but they don't come in packages from the grocery's meat section. Instead, Joseph and his staff serve them sizzling from the grill in poppy seed buns and slathered with an eye-popping array of toppings.

In fall 2006, Joseph opened a 28-seat lunch counter in downtown Indianapolis. In the cheerful, no-fuss setting, the hot dog, nicknamed "an Indy original" by his forebears, is the main attraction; walls full of testimonials from the local press hail the return of the King David brand.

"This is not a heart-healthy menu, and we don't hide it," says Joseph, who for this year's NCAA Sweet 16 games in

Indianapolis unveiled the "Boom Boom Dog," adorned with a fried egg and cheese and named for a high-school buddy who suggested the concoction. The regular menu includes 10 options plus the "build your own" from ingredients that include four kinds of mustard, celery salt, sauerkraut and other delights.

The choices pay homage to Chicago and New York City, but the quarter-pound, kosher, fire-engine red, all-beef dog is what Joseph hopes will become Indy's signature. "It's a garlic, pepper, smoky flavor," he says. "It tastes like meat. Some hot dogs taste like Play-Doh."

Joseph's grandfather, William Hene, an attorney, immigrated to the United States from Germany with his brother, Paul, a butcher, and unveiled their secret recipe in the 1940s. Grocery sales of the hot dogs continued until the early 1990s.

Joseph left his marketing career to continue his family tradition from behind a grill, heeding advice from his wife, Hannah, an Indy native who grew up with the King David brand. But first he had to search for the recipe, which he found stowed in his great-aunt Margot's attic. Years before, after an employee had stolen the recipe and won a prize at a local food fair, the Hene brothers had torn up all the English copies and left



■ Honoring tradition, Joseph only tweaked the King David logo created by his grandfather and great-uncle. On warm days, dog lovers stand in line for two hours outside his downtown store.

only the German originals. After a translator deciphered the recipe, Joseph found a four-generation family owned meat company, Usinger's of Milwaukee, to re-create the dog. Then came the critical test: A tasting for the family, including Margot and his grandmother, Wally. "It was exactly the same," he recalls with pride. "The taste and the smell were just as everyone remembered."