

New Downtown eatery revives family tradition

At King David Dogs, grandson carries on after meat business closed in early '90s

By **Daniel Lee**

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Brent Joseph serves up plump, grilled all-beef hot dogs on steamed poppy seed buns to the lunch crowd at King David Dogs.

He builds creations including the Reuben Dog (Swiss cheese, sauerkraut and Thousand Island dressing) and favorites such as the chili dog and Chicago-style hot dog.

Joseph's standard work attire is a plain white shirt printed with the words "We're Back." It's a simple message attached to a long and proud family history.

Since opening in November, the small eatery at 15 N. Pennsylvania St. brings the rebirth of the King David brand name that was part of a meat business created by Joseph's grandfather and great-uncle. The two men — brothers William and Paul Hene, who were Jewish — fled Germany with their family after the Nazis came to power in the 1930s, eventually settling in Indianapolis.

William, a lawyer, and Paul, a butcher, built their new lives by co-founding the Hene Meat Co. in 1941. That business, headquartered for many years along 15th Street near Methodist Hospital, sold hot dogs, summer sausage, liverwurst and other meats under the King David name to delis and grocery stores until it closed in the early 1990s.

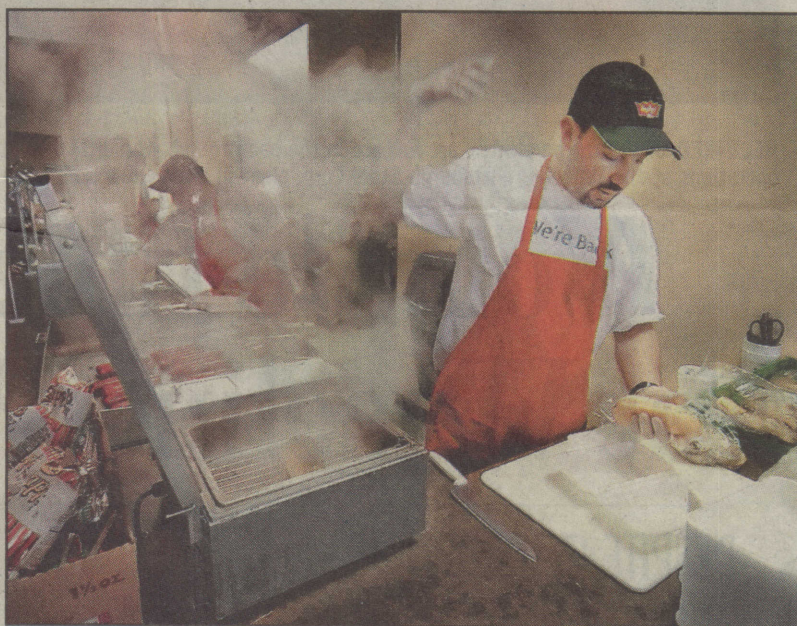
Now, the 32-year-old Joseph has reinvented the family business.

Instead of a meat company that supplied local stores, as the Hene Meat Co. did, he is focusing on selling only hot dogs directly to consumers. After Joseph and his wife, Hannah, came up with the idea for the eatery, they sought the blessing of the family.

"When Brent and Hannah came to us, we were thrilled," said Carol Joseph, Brent's mother and William Hene's daughter. "We said yes, absolutely."

William Hene died in an auto accident in the 1980s, and Paul Hene died in 2001 at the age of 91. However, William's wife, Wally, and Paul's wife, Margot, are still alive. In fact, Brent Joseph got the original recipe — handwritten in German on a scratchpad — for the King David hot dogs from Margot's home.

Brent Joseph, who majored in ad-



ALAN PETERSIME / The Star

WITH RELISH: King David Dogs' owner, Brent Joseph (above), starts to build a hot dog after steaming the bun. He is carrying on the recipe and brand of all-beef hot dogs once sold by his grandfather, William Hene, and great-uncle, Paul Hene.



vertising at the University of Kansas, thoroughly researched the restaurant industry before opening the shop.

He found a meat company in Wisconsin to make the hot dogs. He spent his personal savings to open the small store under the name "King David Dogs: An Indy Original." He recruited family friend Matt Hursh to help him run the shop.

Joseph hopes the hot dogs become a local favorite, adding: "When you think of Indianapolis, there are not a whole lot of signature foods."

His customer base is building. The lunchtime crowd often overflows the eatery's 24 seats. Customers can pick from 27 toppings for their dogs, ranging from Bertman Original Ball Park Mustard

from Cleveland to bacon and white chicken chili.

All that goes atop the all-beef, quarter-pound, red-colored dog. Prices for dogs run from \$3.99 to \$4.99, with drinks and sides extra.

"I'm not really a fan of hot dogs, but they have a lot of good toppings here," said Erin Sexton, a student at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis back for her second visit to King David. Her choice: the BBQ Dog.

Joseph hopes to attract more repeat customers. He said business is off to a good start, with the shop selling about 100 hot dogs a day.

He said he has been learning by trial and error. For example, Joseph did not attract the business he had hoped to before Indiana Pacers home games and for now is open weekdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Longer term, Joseph hopes to open additional locations.

He added that King David Dogs already has regulars, and some customers tell him that they remember his grandfather and great-uncle.

A framed photo of Paul and William Hene hangs just above a counter where customers grab napkins, utensils and ketchup. The brothers in the portrait look on as Joseph prepares hot dog after hot dog.

"They were both real genteel, from the old country," Carol Joseph said. "They would be very proud, let me tell you."

★ Call Star reporter Daniel Lee at (317) 444-6311.



KING DAVID DOGS

- ◆ **Location:** 15 N. Pennsylvania St., Downtown Indianapolis.
- ◆ **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- ◆ **Key personnel:** Brent Joseph, owner and president; Matt Hursh, operations manager.
- ◆ **Favorites:** Chili Dog (chili, with beans, cheddar cheese, chopped onions and spicy brown mustard); Chicago Dog (chopped onions, two tomato wedges, yellow mustard, neon green sweet relish, sport peppers, a kosher pickle spear, and a dash of celery salt — no ketchup); build your own (choose from 27 regular or premium toppings).
- ◆ **Contact:** (317) 632-DOGS or kingdaviddogs.com.