



Itsey Brenner pulled bread from the oven.

Staff photo by Richard S. Heyza

It's a bakery that's all in the family

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BELLEVUE — Back in 1902, Abe Brenner would hitch up his horse and buggy and deliver his fresh-baked bread house to house. In those days, there weren't any preservatives, softeners, plastic bags or even sliced bread — just good, solid loaves, baked in Dutch ovens over a fire.

Today, the Brenner family bakery has a huge, walk-in, rack oven, and trucks to deliver their breads, pastries and bagels. But many of the traditions remain.

Three of Abe's sons, Joe, Charley and Itsey, as well as a daughter, Yetta, run the family business which started in 1902 after Abe moved to Seattle. Joe said his father came to the United States from Galicia, an area between Poland and Austria, with his uncle, who went to work as a baker in Virginia.

Joe, who is one of eight chil-

bellevue

dren, said they grew up in the bakery. "All of the family, as soon as they were big enough, helped."

He remembers being sent to get the wood chips to heat the bagel pot when he was 4 or 5 years old. His brother, Itsey, had to quit high school to drive the truck, and the business had a rough time during World War II when five of the sons were in the service.

Despite the fact that Joe and his brothers and sister own the place, they still work right along side their employes on many days.

"We still basically do everything the way my father did," Joe says with pride.

In an age of mass production and chemicals, the Brenner family has never used preservatives or softeners in their breads. Their stock in trade throughout the years have been well-baked, heav-

ier breads rather than the American white.

Their food is also kosher and some of their best customers are families who have traded with the Brenner bakery for years. Joe said the bakery caters everything from births to deaths for many of their customers. "We're part of home to them."

Kosher means the food is clean and fit to eat according to Jewish dietary laws and it is prepared under rabbinical supervision. Joe said a rabbi makes occasional visits to the bakery, much like the health inspector, to make sure everything is done according to the laws.

There is also a prayer taped to the door of one of the ovens and each morning someone throws a wad of dough into the oven and lets it burn as a gesture of thanks for the wheat and other ingredients.

Their products are distributed locally through selected supermarkets, several restaurants and the Three Girls Bakery in the Pike Place Market. They also have a shop and delicatessen at the bakery in Bellevue.

And to make sure the traditions are carried on, another generation of Brennens, Itsey's and Charley's sons, are working in the bakery.