

WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NOMEN

BY MARC LEGOFF

On a particular winter morning at Edmart Deli in Pikesville, eight customers are sizing up the salmon and checking out the chopped liver.

Three men in business suits are eating lunch at formica-topped tables in the back. A new arrival, Wilma Schuster, walks in, orders a sandwich, sits down at an empty table and opens a newspaper.

Moments later, owner Marty Lev brings Schuster her plate. When this reporter asks her what her favorite sandwich is, it's *Lev* who answers. "Rare roast beef," he says. Schuster, smiling, agrees.

"I've known Marty most of my life. Since I was 5 years old back when we both lived in East Baltimore. He's like a big brother to me. This place is a second home. I come here two or three times a week."

Another of Lev's childhood friends, Sam Winik, places a carry-out order. "I've known Marty for 60 years," Winik says. "Friends or not, this is one of the finest delis south of New York. There's no place comparable in Baltimore."

OK, so you might expect such rave reviews from a hometown crowd that's been stopping by Edmart for 40 years. But here's what California cookbook author and food writer L. John Harris had to say about Lev's deli in his recent PBS documentary, "Divine Food: 100 Years in the Kosher Delicatessen Trade":

"In my mind, the style, feel and appearance of Martin Lev's deli harks back to a time in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. There's a trend for delicatessens these days to be more like restaurants. Edmart,

A NEIGHBORHOOD
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Miriam Golob and her 4-year-old daughter Adina are Columbia residents. Golob says she frequented Edmart while growing up in Pikesville and makes a point to stop in when she's in town. "My favorites are the corned beef and brisket," she said. Before mother and daughter leave, Lev's daughter, Shelley Lev-Wiseman, offers Adina a piece of candy from a basket behind the cash register.

"We have the third generations in some families who come here now," Lev said. "And when we give the candy to their kids, the parents will say, 'I remember when you used to do that for me.'"

Baltimore Sun columnist Dan Rodricks, in the store that day, says "I make sure I stop in Edmart whenever I'm in Pikesville. I especially go for the knish. Potatoes, meat and spinach. Mmmmm. My children love it. For Catholics, we really do appreciate a good knish, let me tell ya," said Rodricks, laughing.

The 900 square foot shop is immaculate. The red-tiled floor adds a colorful touch, as do shelves of brightly hued tins of chocolates, candies and biscotti.



Edmart Deli is a mom-and-pop-and-daughter store. Shelley Lev-Wiseman can most often be seen behind the cash register.

On the wall above the cash register are more than a dozen certificates from Baltimore publications, including recognition for "best chopped liver," "best corned beef sandwich," "best deli tray" and "best Jewish deli."

Lev, 72, modestly sums up his success by saying, "Give the customers what they want. I'd like to think that our high quality of merchandise and friendly service is what keeps 'em coming back."

He set up shop at 1427 Reisterstown Road, a block south of Old Court Road, in July 1958. "That was before there was a Beltway. Old Court Road used to dead end at Reisterstown Road and didn't extend eastwards yet. We were considered the end of the city limits," he recalled.

Lev has been in the deli industry all his

partner, Jacob Sussman, opened Sussman and Lev's Deli on East Baltimore Street, considered to be the first full-scale delicatessen restaurant in Baltimore.

Marty's family lived above the restaurant, and he helped out on weekends and summers until joining the Army in 1944 during World War II. One of the most popular Jewish delis in its time, Sussman and Lev's closed in 1951. After the war, Marty, 19, married his wife, Ruth. They will celebrate their 53rd anniversary in June. They have two daughters, Lev-Wiseman and Judy Schlossberg.

At his previous job, Lev worked 12-hour days and kept the store open until 2 a.m. When launching Edmart, he decided to scale down and limit hours from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. "I wanted to spend