

# Good sandwiches fill need

IN A SEA OF OFFICES, FOUR DELI OUTLETS WORTH THEIR SALT

By Holly Hayes

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It's a typical Silicon Valley story: See a need and fill it.

Back in 1974, brothers Glenn and Randy Nelson thought that the valley's sea of office parks lacked a key element — someplace to grab a meal that wasn't at a catering truck. So they came up with a concept to serve high-quality made-to-order deli-style foods in an efficient way that would get office slaves in and out in way under an hour.

Their first deli opened on De La Cruz Boulevard, and even though that location is now closed, the name lives on at four De La Cruz Delis, two in San Jose and one each in Sunnyvale and Santa Clara.

Randy Nelson has reason to be proud of the little deli empire he has continued to nourish. His four restaurants are flourishing, dishing up delicious, satisfying, fairly priced meals for people on the run who don't want mass-produced fast food.

The time-saving set-up — ingeniously simple, really — involves separate food preparation areas. You want a hot pastrami sandwich? Line up here. Slow-roasted beef? Head to another station. Cold sandwiches get their own spot. Ditto the salad bar, soup area and beverages.

Zip through the cashier line, find a seat and you're all set.

You're especially all set if you've ordered a pastrami sandwich (\$5.98). Ultra-lean and richly flavorful, this is dreamy pastrami that doesn't need much embellishment other than a swipe of mustard and mayo and a slice of cheddar. On a recent visit, I chose to have mine piled high on a crusty onion roll, but it's also stellar on dark rye or a sourdough roll.

One of my companions — a De La Cruz reg-

ular who usually orders the intensely delicious, thin-sliced rare roast beef (\$5.98) — was talked into stepping up to the meatball sandwich (\$5.49), and now his culinary horizons have been broadened. At least a half dozen golf-ball-sized meatballs were nestled into a sweet French roll and lightly blanketed with a

nicely sweet marinara sauce. He paid 40 cents extra for two slices of provolone cheese that meltingly tied the whole thing together (the standard version comes with Parmesan).

Your basic ham-and-cheese takes on star quality here. The taster in our group liked its perfect proportions — not overloaded with lettuce, no huge slabs of tomatoes that make it a struggle to eat — and the just-right stack of paper-thin ham slices and provolone on sourdough bread.

Less successful was the chicken salad sandwich on rye that had too much dark meat in it for our group's taste. Celery added a nice crunch, however. Mysteriously, there was mustard on the rye bread. An ordering malfunction, I assume.

On other visits, I have swooned over the French dip sandwich, a nice pile of that fantastic roast beef served with a slightly spicy *jus*, and the BBQ beef sandwich, which pairs the roast beef with a savory sauce I'd like to clone (\$5.98 each).

And here's maybe the ultimate compliment to the De La Cruz Deli. I once took a transplanted Chicagoan to the San Jose location on Charcot Avenue one day for lunch. He had scoffed at the notion that good corned beef could be had outside of his beloved

Windy City. One bite of his sandwich — lean, succulent corned beef on a tasty Dutch crunch roll — and he was in heaven.

## De La Cruz Deli

850 Charcot Ave., San Jose. (408) 435-1185

(Other locations, and slightly different food

offerings: 2585 N. First St., San Jose;

3910 Freedom Circle, Santa Clara;

and 845-A Stewart Drive, Sunnyvale.)

**Hours:** 6 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Friday. Closed Saturday-Sunday. (Other locations have different hours; check [www.delacruzdeli.com](http://www.delacruzdeli.com).)

**Types of food:** Made-to-order sandwiches, plus an extensive salad bar, soups, chili and sides such as potato, macaroni and pasta salads. The Santa Clara location has a grill that turns out Philly cheese steak and grilled Reubens, among other items.

**Average meal price:** Around \$8.

**Good choices:** You can't go wrong with pastrami, roast beef, turkey and corned beef. The meatball sandwich and French dip also are recommended.

**Not recommended:** The macaroni salad was nice and cold but lacked zip.

**Attitude:** Efficient and friendly.

**Amenities:** The place is big enough that you can escape the giant-screen TV if you want. There are a few patio tables outside. Santa Clara deli has free WiFi.

**Vegetarian options:** Nature's Harvest Sandwich (\$5.29), vegetarian vegetable soup (\$2.50-\$4.25) and the salad bar.

**Drinks:** Soft drinks, bottled water. The deli at Charcot Avenue has a full bar.

**Eat in car:** I wouldn't try it.

**Next-day edibility:** In a pinch. Get sandwich leftovers into plastic wrap.

**Who goes there:** Workers from the surrounding office parks.

**Credit cards:** Yes.

**Parking:** Free on site, but at high noon it can be hard to snag a spot.

Restaurant reviews are conducted anonymously. The Mercury News pays for all meals.