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Seattle Times food writer Nancy Leson serves up the best info and tips on Northwest food, cooking, dining and restaurants.

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August 18, 2010 at 5:00 PM

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Obama: "I'll have a turkey sandwich and a Jammer to-go"

Posted by [Nancy Leson](#)

There was no "royal taster" to make certain his food was not poisoned. But there was some confusion as to what -- if anything -- President Barack Obama would eat when he sat down with a group of small-business owners Tuesday at [Grand Central Bakery](#) in Pioneer Square.

Prepped for the occasion, co-owner Gillian Allen-White was told he'd likely order a [pastry](#) and some Earl Grey tea during their round-table discussion at Grand Central's flagship cafe. "I said, 'Is he going to eat it?'" I was picturing him with croissant flakes on his suit! They said he usually nibbles, but he won't finish it, and we were told *not* to be offended."

Instead, His Royal Slenderness went whole hog with half a turkey sandwich and a spinach salad, and ordered a jam-filled biscuit for the road. While it's no secret that Secret Service agents were on hand to keep a close eye on the proceedings, the food-prep "was all in real-time," insists Allen-White, who sat at the president's elbow as he ate during their [lunch-time chat](#).



From left: Obama; Gillian Allen-White, Joe Fugere, founder of Tutta Bella Neapolitan Pizzeria; U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke and Tiffany Turner of the Inn at Discovery Coast, talking biz at Grand Central Bakery in Pioneer Square. [Seattle Times photo by Ken Lambert]

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When word came down Saturday about the president's upcoming visit, Pioneer Square cafe manager Sarah Lucey was skeptical at first, figuring the White House herald sent to break the (hush-hush) news in person would soon crack a grin and say, "Smile! You're on Candid Camera!" But when he insisted he was the real deal, she asked him for his credentials, said Allen-White, before calling the corporate office. On Tuesday, Lucey was one of the nervous few on hand during the presidential visit.

When Obama arrived, "He walked through the stinky garage-door entrance, where we take the garbage out," said Allen-White, who -- knees knocking -- was waiting by the kitchen freezer to greet him. Expecting behavior more presidential, she said, he put everyone at ease after he "bounded in, saying, 'Hi! Nice to meet you!' to the entire staff, and asking the baker, 'What are you making? Can I get some of that?'"

It was Lucey who stood behind the counter as cranberry chutney was slathered on Como bread for Obama's turkey sandwich, allowing that indeed the president could use his political clout and eat local -- with a special "side"-portion of Grand Central's Skagit Valley Salad a toss of Willie Greens baby spinach, Skagit Sun strawberries, Gothberg Farm's goat's milk feta cheese and Walla Walla sweet onions with strawberry-balsamic vinaigrette. For which he paid in cash, pulling a \$20 bill from his wallet and leaving a token of his appreciation in the tip jar and his signature on a receipt ("We're going to frame it," said Allen-White).

Just before he got up to face the cameras for his [televised Election Day speech](#), Obama turned to the staff at Grand Central, brandished his pearly whites and asked, "Do I have spinach in my teeth?" A new hire, three days on the job, piped up and said, "Yes, President Obama, you do." At which point the prez put his finger in his mouth, snagged the offending greenery and said, "Yep! I got it."

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