

Bottomfeeder

Meatloaf Crucial to Pioneer Square's Renaissance

By Mike Seely, Monday, May. 17 2010 @ 8:00AM

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Only the brave shall descend Wang's stairs.

Its nights may still belong to loud music lovers, but Pioneer Square has seen better days. That's a tough point to dispute for even the neighborhood's most summery boosters. Elliott Bay Book Co. has fled to Capitol Hill, and an eastward gallery migration to the Tashiro Kaplan building and beyond has largely left Occidental Park to brown baggin' boozehounds and bocce ball enthusiasts. The latter group can be counted on one hand, the former on the arms of a dozen octopi or more.

But there's still one thing the neighborhood does better than just about any other in town: meatloaf sandwiches.

When devising strategies for how to return neighborhoods like Pioneer Square to their onetime thrones of greatness, urban planners rarely factor "homemade meatloaf dispensaries per

capita" into their matrix of attributes. But they should. Perhaps you whined when served meatloaf as a child, but even still, it likely grew on you to the point where it came to exemplify a feeling of rootedness. It is food that makes you feel at home, and if people are awash in that wave of comfort when eating meatloaf in Pioneer Square, that can only bode well for the neighborhood.

Yet Bakeman's proprietor Jason Wang does about everything he can to ensure that only those willing to fall in line with his fiercely regimented code of conduct ever descend the stairs to his basement cafeteria again. If dad made you cry when he busted your butt with a belt for spitting out sprouts, Wang will verbally turn your ass maroon. Stepping up to Wang's lunch counter for the first time is the very definition of being thrown into the deep end without so much as a dog-paddling lesson. But if you've got the resilience to figure it out on your own, Wang and his staff will reward you with a classic, mustardy meatloaf sandwich made from scratch, at prices that amount to rent-control for the famished.

Down First Avenue a spell sits the original Grand Central Bakery. With Elliott Bay gone, the bakery might be the most recognizable beacon of the Square's character before sundown. With tables lazily spread out through the gorgeous old Grand Central Building's large lobby area, the bakery instantly evokes enough cosmopolitan sophistication to make a preservationist's chest puff up with pride.

Grand Central makes a mean meatloaf sandwich--hot, thinly-sliced, and topped with pepper jack on Como bread (ketchup, no mustard). But, sadly, they only serve it in the winter; spring brings chicken [salad] to the seasonal menu instead.

Bakeman's, 122 Cherry Street, 622-3375; **Grand Central Bakery**, 214 1st Ave. S. (also in Eastlake and Portland, Ore.; and coming soon to Burien), 622-3644, grandcentralbakery.com PIONEER SQUARE

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