



Clockwise from top: An Italian; making mustard; on the line; the crew (from left): Michael Reif, Blake Nelson, Jae Humphrey, and Shane Grundtner



9 a.m. One hundred loaves of ciabatta await as the staff arrives. Blake Nelson sets up the line, griddles veggies, and slices cheeses. Shane Grundtner, armed with a single commercial food processor, makes the condiments: First, he blends egg yolks, olive oil, apple cider vinegar, garlic, and salt into a smooth, spreadable aioli. Queued up are the ingredients for pesto, Thousand Island dressing, and butter. Reif sets up tables and chairs, replenishes the chips, and stocks the bottled beverages in the self-serve fridge.

10 a.m. The sandwich line is hustling through a catering order of 18 sandwiches. Local distributors Fresh Guys and Cheese Importers drop off fresh and aged provisions, such as produce, meats, and cheeses.

10:30 a.m. The to-go lunch rush has begun. A woman orders an iced tea and an Italian: three types of salami, Asiago, aioli, and a handful of arugula tossed—to order—in red wine vinaigrette. An hour later, the dine-in business picks up.

Noon The two large, shared outdoor tables are full, as are most of the seats indoors, and there's a line at the counter. Nelson slices bread and meats to order; Grundtner completes and plates sandwiches accented with house-made jalapeño pickles. Reif's got the front of the house, taking orders, running plates, and handling payments—in that order. "We do it like a restaurant," he says. "Make yourself at home, help yourself to whatever you need, and at the

end we'll just ring you up. Everybody gets on the honor system that way."

12:53 p.m. The last ciabatta loaf is sold, so Reif hangs the "Sold out!" sign. The place bustles with customers finishing their sandwiches well past 1 p.m.

1:30 p.m. Nelson and Grundtner tackle the dishes while Reif texts a specialty meat order to Tonal's Meats in Arvada for Tuesday delivery. Just past 2 p.m. the crew sits down and eats American sandwiches: turkey, tomatoes, smoked Gouda, aioli, and olive-oil-



tossed spring greens served on toasted bread (frozen leftovers).

2:15 p.m. The last couple of hours of the workday are marked by cleaning, resetting, more condiment making—mustard, this time, as two types of mustard seeds plus mustard powder, vinegar, honey, and water meet in the food processor—and checking in deliveries.

3:45 p.m. Reif handles the accounting; he notes payroll in a notebook, distributes tips, balances the cash drawer, prepares the bank deposit bag, and reviews sales reports from Square. Just past 4 p.m. the deli crew locks up and leaves with a few sun-filled hours still ahead.



Slice Of Life

An inside look at the daily flurry of sandwich making.

◆ **OUTSIDE CURTIS PARK DELICATESSEN**, a man steps past a dozen people in line and through the doorway. He looks up at the menu, which is obscured by an unfortunate but familiar banner: "Sold out! The addicts ate them all." He frowns, and then leaves. "We try for that not to happen," owner Michael Reif says. Mondays are hard to predict, though. "It's usually our slowest day, but the weather is the wild card."

The deli is entering its fifth year serving Curtis Park and its neighbors via a lunch-only concept. Six days a week, Reif and company turn fresh-baked City Bakery ciabatta, house-made condiments, top-quality meats, cheeses, and fresh produce into remarkably tasty sandwiches—until the bread is gone. "Fresh food is a limited resource," Reif says. "We serve our sandwiches from 11 a.m. until we sell out." Consider yourself warned: Get to the deli early or go home hungry.

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