



Thoughts on Food BY WAYNE ROBINS

# Schmeer campaign

*An ambitious program helps Brooklyn's bialys and other delights go global*

**T**here was a time not long ago when it was tough to get a good bialy in Tokyo. But thanks to Brooklyn Goes Global, a nonprofit division of the borough's Chamber of Commerce, you could say that the bialy deficit with Japan is getting shmeered, and that other culinary deprivations abroad are being similarly remedied.

Usually, for the smaller manufacturers that dominate Brooklyn's food industry — makers of products like bagels, beer and soda — foreign exports can be an impenetrable maze of tariff, delivery, distribution, promotion, regulatory and marketing problems.

That's where Brooklyn Goes Global (and its domestic partner, Brooklyn's Kitchen) comes in.

"We negotiate the real and the perceived barriers," said Jen O'Connor, director of Brooklyn Goes Global. "We act as a kind of nonprofit export broker — kind of like the Brooklyn Bridge to overseas markets."

They've certainly helped the Bell family, which has been making bialys and

Bialys have long been known throughout the bagel belt: the tri-state area and Florida.

Four years ago, Warren Bell began taking the family's baked goods to trade shows, and it was at one of them that he found a Japanese distributor who was looking for another nosh to supplement the bagels it was already importing.

Creating a bialy to Japanese specifications, however, was not, philosophically, a slam dunk. The Japanese prefer their bagels and bialys baked with sweet flavors. Technically, a bialy has no sugar.

"Would I produce a product the way they wanted it? It took a lot for me to do this," Bell said. "In order to grow, you have to compromise and do things you think aren't the best idea."

So Bell began making flavored bialys: chocolate, chocolate chip, blueberry, apple-cinnamon-walnut. "Some people thought it was a 'shonda,'" Bell said, using the Yiddish word for disgrace. "But not everybody knows what a bialy is, so to them, it was the best-tasting bread ever."

Administrative obstacles would have been especially challenging without Brook-



HELAYNE SEIDMAN

**SWEET ON BIALYS** Baker Bell had to add sugar to his product to suit Japanese tastes.

is a nightmare, except it wasn't because of Brooklyn Goes Global," said bialyman Bell. "They helped me get a shipping company, a letter of credit, matching funds for advertising... I make the product to make the sale, they did almost everything after that."

Brooklyn Goes Global's O'Connor and the rest of her staff — four full-time and two part-time workers and two full-time student volunteers — represent as many as 90 manufacturers every month. They do market research. They contact distributors. They do "export readiness" studies, to determine whether there's a demand for a product in a given country, and analyze both practical issues, like shipping and perishability, and intangibles like quality.

The Brooklyn Goes Global and Brooklyn's Kitchen groups also provide an umbrella for diverse companies so they don't have to compete alone. At annual trade shows such as the supermarket

Kosherfest, a dozen or more companies are represented at a single stop.

At the recent Fancy Food Show, Brooklyn edibles and beverages such as Damascus Bakeries, Haddar Kosher foods, Olde Brooklyn Sodas, Brooklyn Brewery, Magic Bean Company and Hena Coffee's shared booth space.

When the Dodgers played in Ebbets Field and embodied the borough as "dem bums," the thought that Brooklyn might have culinary cachet beyond Junior's cheesecake and Nathan's hot dogs seemed far-fetched. Not to O'Connor, however, even if she did grow up in Queens Village. "People all over the world know Brooklyn, and love Brooklyn," she said.

"We had some Eastern European buyers from a small city in the Czech Republic. We did not have to say: 'Brooklyn, New York,' or 'Brooklyn, U.S.A.' Everybody knows Brooklyn." Even in Japan they know Brooklyn, the place