



JOHN O'BOYLE/THE STAR-LEDGER

Karen Bloom and Nick Chromowsky share a laugh with fellow workers as they prepare sandwiches at A Catered Affair in Hillsborough.

## Sandwiches match deli's prime location

### A Catered Affair

Boro Center, 424 Route 206, Hillsborough; (908) 874-7790. Hours: 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday; 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday

You could call the corner of Amwell Road and Route 206 in Hillsborough the crossroads of Central Jersey. Twenty, 25 years ago, this corner, like much of the surrounding area, was rural. Now, good luck navigating the traffic jams.

But it's a great location for, say, a restaurant; I'm guessing one thing restaurant owners don't have to give out is directions. The Boro Center, a small strip mall where A Catered Affair is located, also includes a Chinese restaurant, the Kalamata Cafe and the Hillsborough Lobster Dock, one of the top Munchmobile stops of last year.

Pete Bloom, owner of A Catered Affair, found his calling rather quickly after serving in the Navy 25-plus years ago. His first job was in customer relations, a job that consisted of "cleaning bathrooms and emptying ashtrays," he recalled not-so-fondly. He lasted a week, then started bartending during the week and doing catering on the weekend. Catering demand grew, and Bloom eventually opened A Catered Affair.

Ignore the name, unless you want to book him for a corporate function or summer barbecue. This is a classic deli, from the grilled chicken sandwiches and Caesar salads to pastrami on rye and Reubens. A Catered Affair rises above the crowded competition in the quality of ingredients.

Take the cole slaw. It's cool and crunchy, and makes for a great addition to the New York, New York (\$6.50), a corned beef and pastrami sandwich that also boasts first-rate rye bread.

Take the small side salads, an afterthought with most deli sandwiches. Who

eats the stuff, anyway? One taste of the fresh, creamy pasta salad here, and you'll want more.

Chili (\$3.25 a cup) and chicken noodle soup (\$2.50 a cup) are always available; check the board for other soups. You'll be hard-pressed to find a thicker chili, and it's tasty besides, clogged with peppers, onions and chunks of beef. The chicken noodle soup is neither bland nor wimpy, with a just-hearty-enough flavor.

You may not flip over the hickory BBQ sauce in the Rhode Island Red chicken sandwich (\$6.75), but you'll love the tender, moist meat. The Imported Prosciutto sandwich (letter G on the menu, \$6.25), with thinly sliced prosciutto, mozzarella and olive oil, is a good choice, although you may want to ask them to go easy on the olive oil.

One complaint: The roast beef in the Rare Roast Beef and Creamy Brie sandwich (letter H, \$5.75) was nowhere near rare, but the brie, hot cherry peppers and Italian roll (it's usually served on whole wheat) made for a winning combination.

Also recommended: the Georgetown (\$6.50), with store-roasted turkey breast, bacon, Russian dressing, tomatoes and melted Swiss on marbled rye. Health-conscious? The Garden Delight (\$5.95) is a waistline-approving mix of fresh tomatoes, sliced onions, cucumbers, zucchini, squash and sprouts topped with melted Swiss inside a pita.

The Greek salad (\$5.25) featured good greens, crumbled feta and enough olives to satisfy olive fanatics like me. The balsamic dressing tasted like 98 percent of the balsamic dressings out there, which is to say, ordinary.

Breakfast — sandwiches, French toast, omelets — is available, and there are dozens of other subs, grilled sandwiches, burgers, and salads.

There was one mystery. The gourmet specialty sandwiches are lettered B through U. What happened to A, Pete Bloom?

"It was a cheddar cheese sandwich; it didn't go over too well," he said, laughing.

Everyone makes mistakes. You won't make one giving this deli at the crossroads of Central Jersey a visit.

Where should Pete eat next? Call him at (973) 392-1765 or e-mail to [pjenovese@starledger.com](mailto:pjenovese@starledger.com).

