Brooklyn Fish Factory a Friday Hot Spot

By
Charles Passy
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Acme Smoked Fish Corporation offers weekly discount day at its Greenpoint, Brooklyn, headquarters

For Five Hours on Fridays, Fish Factory Is a Hot Spot

Once a week, lox-lovers converge on Acme Smoked Fish in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, hungry for bargain prices

A worker pushes a cart with salmon in brine at Acme Smoked Fish Corporation in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. AGATON STROM FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Salmon brines in a large cart at Acme Smoked Fish’s Greenpoint, Brooklyn, headquarters, where Fish Fridays brings scores of discount-seekers. PHOTO: AGATON STROM FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
If you visit Acme Smoked Fish’s headquarters in Brooklyn’s Greenpoint neighborhood on Friday morning, you’ll find a scene that is anything but corporate.

A line of customers snakes out the door, with a wait-time that can run upward of 30 minutes. Inside, controlled chaos prevails as patrons grab package after package of smoked salmon or put in requests for unwrapped fish that is sold by weight, all at prices that can be up to 50% under retail.

And that is to say nothing of special items—like a dish of salmon poke dressed with mangoes and jalapeños.

This loxapalooza is a weekly event that goes by the formal name Fish Friday. The tradition extends back at least a few decades at the family-owned company, which traces its roots to the beginning of the 20th century. Acme now calls itself the largest producer of smoked fish in the country.

The company expects the lines for Fish Friday to be even longer this Friday, which comes a few days before Yom Kippur. The Jewish holiday, known as the Day of Atonement, entails a 24-hour period of fasting, followed by the “break fast,” a hearty spread that for many Ashkenzic Jews traditionally includes smoked fish.

For scores of Fish Friday regulars, however, no holiday is needed to justify stocking up on lox and sable and herring and whitefish and...well, you get the idea.
Gary Brownstein helps customers behind the counter during ‘Fish Friday,’ a weekly discount day held at the headquarters of Acme Smoked Fish Corporation in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Mr. Brownstein has worked for the company since 1967 and creates weekly special recipes.

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The attraction, of course, is the bargain pricing. Salmon sold by the pound generally runs $16 to $18, with the cost varying slightly depending upon the type (nova, gravlax, etc.). At stores in the city, prices can easily top $40, particularly for salmon that is hand-sliced.

And yet, Moshe Shmueli, a 32-year-old resident of Brooklyn’s Crown Heights neighborhood, said Fish Friday is about more than a deal.

“It’s the atmosphere,” he said, pointing to the busy scene.
Another plus, Mr. Shmueli said: the product is super fresh since it is prepared on site. The result is that he inevitably purchases more than he had planned. “Instead of buying a half pound, you buy three pounds.”

Another group of regulars sees Fish Friday as a reward after a morning’s labor. The North Brooklyn Runners club stops by once a month after completing a run of 1¾ miles. “I mean, who doesn’t love fish?” said Jennifer Herr, the club’s president.

This is all a far cry from when Fish Friday started, says Emily Caslow Gindi, Acme’s director of customer service and one of the family members behind the company. In the early days of the event, the idea was just to sell some leftover items to neighborhood residents—mostly, the Polish immigrants who dominated Greenpoint long before newer arrivals began spilling in.

Business stayed fairly quiet for years. But in the past decade, word has gotten out—not just with locals but also with visitors. “I still think we must be in some Japanese tourist guide,” said Richard Schiff, an Acme vice president.

Acme won’t discuss the company’s sales in general and Fish Friday sales in particular. But the company says the weekly event isn’t a significant income generator compared with its broader nationwide business.

And as popular as Fish Friday is becoming, the company doesn’t plan to expand the event beyond five hours (8 a.m. to 1 p.m.). The main reason, officials explain, is that Acme can’t afford to jeopardize its relationships with retail stores throughout the New York City area, which carry its products at full price.

Plus, there is something special about a “store” that comes to life once a week, said Mr. Schiff.

In its own way, he added, “it is still this secret New York experience.”

Write to Charles Passy at cpassy@wsj.com