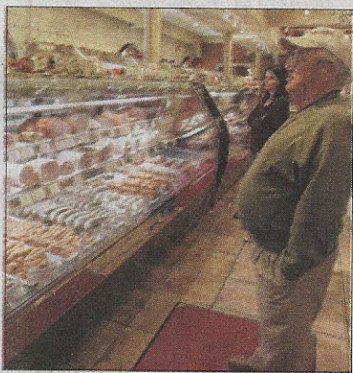


SAVOR nj.com/food

AMANDA BROWN/THE STAR-LEDGER

Roman Ryba, of Fredon, orders meats at Piast, a Polish market in Garfield.

Kielbasa fit for a king

If I told you to go out of your way for beef jerky, would you laugh? If I told you this particular beef jerky is hand-sliced from Black Angus beef, marinated in a mild dry rub, then roasted over hardwoods until it's a tender and seriously



TASTE OF NJ
**Brooke
Tarabour**
nj.com/living

scrumptious snack, would you believe me? And if I told you people came from all over (actor Stephen Baldwin just happened to stop by Piast while we were taking photos for his regular supply) would you take a ride to Garfield to see what else Piast has to offer?

Well, you should, because Piast is quite a place. The newest of a trio of Polish food stores owned by the Rybak family (the other two are at 800 River Drive, Garfield, 973-340-4722,

SEE **TASTE**, PAGE 36

IF YOU GO

Piast

1 Passaic St., Garfield, (973)

614-1315. piast.us

Hours: 6 a.m.-7 p.m., Mondays-Saturdays; 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

Closed Sundays.

Taste

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

and 1899 Springfield Ave., Maplewood, 973-761-1413.), it opened last year and is known to family and customers alike as "the castle" for its architectural design. Fancy, yes. Formidable, no way.

In fact, prices are extremely low and quality is sky-high. Hey, if they make beef jerky from Black Angus beef (\$11.99 per pound), that should tell you something. All prepared foods are made in-house from scratch; meats are smoked next door in a new state-of-the-art smokehouse, and many are roasted for hours in three "fire pits" using oak, cherry and maple hardwoods. Attention to detail and traditional cooking methods make Piast busy at all hours, but the staff remains friendly and committed to helping you through the maze of Polish product names. If you want to try something, just ask for a sample.

There are two floors in the castle, and upstairs you'll find plenty of Polish giftware — everything from crystal to cosmetics. The shelves are also filled with imported groceries, including Eastern Europe's most popular brands of cookies, chocolate, snacks, sauces, soups, beverages, baby food and of course, herrings and pickles. You can pick up a 12-ounce jar of gooseberry preserves or plum butter for about \$2, and a large bar of creamy Polish hazelnut chocolate for less than that.

As for prepared food, it starts at the hot food counter, winds its way around the butcher, smoked fish department, European cheeses and house-smoked cold cuts, kielbasa, and winds up, happily, at the bakery. My suggestion is not to miss any of the stops.

FAMILY AFFAIR

Martin Rybak is in charge of the operation, and his parents, Henry and Maria, brought the concept of affordable, homemade food — along with their family's old — country recipes — from southern Poland in 1991. They opened a small store in Maplewood and the idea took off. Now more than 1,000 people buy a hot meal from one of the Rybak kitchens every day. The River Road store is the busiest, but this shop is more user-friendly if you can't speak Polish.

The fact that \$6 will get you a good dinner with a choice of 15 entrées (salmon in dill and leeks, flounder Florentine, perfect, handmade pierogi, meaty and moist pork chops, goulash, meat loaf, roast chicken, etc.) and two sides is a fine value, but this food is really good, there's plenty of it, and the price would be way more in most other venues. How they can afford to serve a platter of smoked five large barbecue ribs, pork shank, Atlantic wild-caught salmon or half a crispy, fresh herb-seasoned chicken with two side dishes (mashed potatoes with lots of cream and butter, farmers' cheese crepes, fresh vegetables, cold salads and more) at those prices is beyond me.

There are also several soups (\$3.49 a quart). Borscht, cabbage, creamy tomato with rice, and pork with sauerkraut were on hand during my visit; I loved the tomato soup, thought the pork and kraut were exceptional and passed on the tripe (\$4.99 a quart).

Next take a look at the butcher shop for excellent deals, including skinless and boneless chicken cutlets for \$3.99 per pound. In the smoked fish department, whole trout, mackerel, butterfish, whiting and eel average \$6-\$9 per pound, and smoked salmon is \$14-\$16.

A CUT ABOVE THE REST

If you've tried all-natural, house-smoked sliced ham, salami and wursts from a place like Piast (at about \$6 per pound), you know the intensity of the flavors takes them way out of the ordinary cold-cut class for sure. The country ham and veal meat loaf are exceptional here, but it's time to talk kielbasa. At \$3.89 per pound for most varieties, they make a fun, one-pan dinner with potatoes and fresh kraut and come in flavors from mild to spicy. The top seller is barbecued, but because of the smoking process, these are smooth-skinned and maintain a lot of moisture, so choose your heat or seasoning — they're great for grilling.

In the bakery, there are about 20 kinds of rectangular-shaped cakes (\$9.99), and the flavor combinations are colorful; Rybak says the bakers have fun with honey, cheesecake, poppy seed, sponge, fruits, nuts and chocolate — some even have Polish candies inside. The cakes tend to be really sweet, and he says the idea is to eat small pieces with coffee or tea. Each day, Piast sells about 2,000 paczeks (traditional Polish fried donuts, 95 cents each), and there's also plenty of traditional chrusciki (fried dough). But try a variety of cookies (\$9.99 per pound), like coconut cream, mini babkas or marmalade crescents; they're terrific.

By the way, if you can't get to Garfield, Piast ships just about everything it sells, including the jerky, so check out its website. There are so many traditional food items here, it takes pages to list what you can order. If you need help with preparations, there are also simple instructions and recipes.

I visited the butcher shop/smokehouse while I was at Piast, and it's really something to see. Two men who look as if they've been cutting meat for decades were slicing strips of beef from beautiful Black Angus roasts for jerky. Another man was marinating the meat, hanging the strips on skewers and readying them for the fire pit. Not your typical packaged, convenience-store product. I think this simple task says everything about Piast; things are made the way they have always been — the right way.

"Taste of New Jersey" appears every other week in Savor. Please send news of your favorite finds with your name and telephone numbers to Savor, "Taste of New Jersey," The Star-Ledger, 1 Star-Ledger Plaza, Newark, N.J. 07102 E-mail Brooke Tarabour at tasteofnj@starledger.com.



AMANDA BROWN/THE STAR-LEDGER

Kaszanka, blood sausage, is for sale at Piast, a Polish market in Garfield.