

Lifestyle

Unusual intern savors slice of life at deli

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On the cramped sandwich line at Katzinger's Delicatessen, the workers avoid collisions by shouting, "Behind you!"

Or, in especially perilous moments, "Behind you with soup!"

I learned this from Artie Isaac, a teacher, speaker, consultant and businessman - and recently a summer intern at the German Village restaurant, 475 S. 3rd St.



Why would a 50-year-old with a long resume want to spend time ferrying sandwiches and bussing tables? Because, he said, one never knows when the end is near. And it arrives without shouting, "Behind you!"

In other words, life is finite, so, if there's something you've always wanted to do, do it. Working in a delicatessen was something he'd always wanted to do.

"I've always loved delicatessens. I like the theater of it. ... You work with young people, making the greatest food, for appreciative clients."

So Isaac, who was already a business adviser to Katzinger's owner Diane Warren, asked whether he could work Friday lunch shifts for a few weeks.

He provided a sense of playfulness and enthusiasm that was good for the rest of the staff, who might not find quite as much joy in food service, she said.

"I think he's been a very good example."

No one who knows Isaac could be terribly surprised to find him delivering orders at a restaurant. He charts his own course.

Two years ago, he sold Young Isaac, his successful advertising and marketing agency, after 18 years. It seemed like a spur-of-the-moment decision, but it was a long time coming.

"I had a condition I called frenetic boredom: really busy, but not engaged," Isaac said. "I was bored."

At the time, he was memorizing lines from *Our Town*, the Thornton Wilder play about the transience of life. It helped persuade him to make a move.

Shortly thereafter, Isaac was off to new adventures. He founded SpeakerSite, a speakers' organization. He teaches at Ohio State University and the Columbus College of Art & Design, works as a consultant and plans to write a book.

He calls it a midlife crisis that he isn't interested in emerging from.

"I'm not looking to particularly hit a groove and stick with it. I don't like the turbulence of uncertainty, but I like the opportunity."

The Katzinger's gig had its moments of turbulence. An intern has a lot to learn in a place known for its dozens of varieties of sandwiches.

"I misdelivered a couple of sandwiches, but before people bit into them, I got them back and moved them on."

He has no desire to own a deli (too much management required, he said) but he's glad he acted on his desire to work in one.

"When I'm 98 and they're plugging that last IV in my arm and my grandkids are saying, 'Hey, Gramps, what did you do at 50?' I want to say I worked in a deli rather than saying I spent 30 more years at that same desk."

Joe Blundo is a Dispatch columnist.