paid their check and confided, “I’m Irish and I bring all my clients here. I come for the pastrami sandwich — there’s nothing else like it.”

Only a few of the customers interviewed during the busy lunch hour Monday said they were Jewish. The others either grew up eating kosher deli food or developed a taste for it after eating at Pastrami N Friends.

Ernie Quartrane, who opened Pastrami N Friends in 1975, said in an interview last week that there had once been five or five other kosher delis within a five-mile radius of his store. Today, his and Zan’s Kosher Deli, about 25 minutes away in Lake Grove, are the only ones left following the closing last month of Commack Kosher Caterers Deli & Market and of Delsen’s Kosher Delicatessen in Bay Shore last year.

Of course, Long Island is not the only place where kosher delis are closing. Last fall, the last full-service kosher restaurant on the demographically morphing Lower East Side, Noah’s Ark, closed its doors (a non-kosher diner is reportedly taking its place). But the situation is particularly acute on the Island, away from Orthodox strongholds like the Five Towns, Great Neck and Plainview.

“There are fewer Jews [in Suffolk] and fewer who are keeping kosher in this part of the world,” said Rabbi Jonathan Waxman, spiritual leader of the Conservative Temple Beth Sholom in Smithtown, L.I.

Pat Ruggiero, the owner of Zan’s, agreed: “There is no growth in the Suffolk Jewish community, and there are fewer practicing Jews here who keep kosher. There are many who are just Jewish by descent, and there is a lot of intermarriage.”

Caryl Walsh of Huntington, who is Jewish, brought her mother, Beth Stall, for lunch at Pastrami N Friends.

“She loves the Jewish deli,” Walsh said. “She loves the chicken salad and coleslaw. And the size of the sandwiches you get here you don’t get elsewhere.”

Chan said he comes regularly because “the food is good.” He said he has non-kosher deli meats and prefers kosher meats.

“I don’t know why, but the other just doesn’t taste the same,” he said.

Despite the changing demographic landscape, Quartrane said he plans to remain kosher.

But two longtime kosher landmarks on Long Island, Deli King in New Hyde Park and Boomy’s in Plainview, became non-kosher in the last year or so.

“There isn’t as much kosher business as there once was,” Harvey Ovadia, Boomy’s owner, said in explaining the switch. “And our clientele was getting older.” He said he became non-kosher six months ago after 30 years in business.

“It was tough,” says Caputo, a former chef at Talking Horse, the restaurant’s sister eatery.

But for some, there is nothing like deli meats.

Laura Conigliaro said she grew up on Long Island, moved in her family’s Chabad in Ariz., 13 years ago, and “missed” Pastrami N Friends.

“We tried to find other hot dogs, but there is nothing like it out there,” she said. “We used to come here every week. We’re leaving tomorrow and I’m here now buying to bring it home with us. Yes, Italians know what a good hot dog is.”

Ronald Dragoon, the owner of Ben’s, arguably the most successful kosher deli chain and one that is opening another store in Scarsdale this summer, said he believes delis are failing because of a “decrease in the number of kosher processors, which has resulted in prices going up.”

“And there used to be many kosher slaughterhouses,” he added. “Now very few are left and prices are very high. Kosher is going to be more expensive and a deli is definitely going to be more expensive too.”

The restaurant section is separate [from the deli counter] and has more of a restaurant feel.

Ruggiero pointed out that not only are many kosher delis hurting but kosher butchers are hurting as well.

In addition to the demise of Commack Kosher, which had been in business for 60 years, Kosher Emperium in Merrick closed last year. Interestingly, another glatt kosher butcher, For Goodness Sake’s, opened in January in Merrick.

“Unlike the kosher delis that have closed in the last year: Andels’ Kosher Delicatessen, which closed in December after 60 years in Roslyn Heights; and Deli on Rye in Albertson. Another deli, Raven’s in Plainview, closed a few years ago.

Among the kosher delis that have closed in the last year: Andels’ Kosher Delicatessen, which closed in December after 60 years in Roslyn Heights; and Deli on Rye in Albertson. Another deli, Raven’s in Plainview, closed a few years ago.

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Thumbs up for kosher hot dogs: Frank Paduano digs in at Pastrami N Friends in Commack. STEWART AIN/WWW

“You Come Here And Buy Memories?”

With a recent rash of kosher deli closings across Long Island, a staple of Jewish life is dying out.

Stewart AIN

Staff Writer

And then there were two — kosher delis left in Suffolk County, that is.

Like independent bookstores or Amtrak stops on the Great Plains, the Long Island kosher delis, squeezed by changing demographics and eating habits, as well as competition from supermarkets like Costco and Trader Joe’s, is fast becoming a thing of the past.

In the past year alone, five kosher delis have closed in Nassau and Suffolk, two of them with histories stretching back more than a half-century.

Several others, with their proprietors’ eyes peeled on the bottom line, have converted, so to speak, from kosher to non-kosher.

One recent afternoon, Barry Holzman and his wife, Arlene, who were visiting from upstate Cambridge, peered with obvious relish at the display counter in the front of Pastrami N Friends, a kosher deli in Commack. It was filled with deli staples like lean cuts of pastrami and corned beef, tongue knishes, creamy potato salad and coleslaw.

“You come here and buy memories,” said Holzman, who said he remembered this food from his childhood.

If Jewish memories can’t always pay the delis’ bills, especially in an area where the Jewish population is thinning out, perhaps non-Jewish ones can.

As he made change behind the counter, Ronny Roman, an owner of Pastrami N Friends, quipped, “We truly are a United Nations of customers.”

He was making change for Mike Phillips of Huntington, who is African American, while Xian Chen, also of Huntington, waited for a table, and Frank Paduano of Ronkonoma downed a frankfurter hot off the grill on his way out.

Paduano’s lunch companion, George Cavanaugh,