NY Knish Factory Fire Leads To Nationwide Shortage

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COPIAGUE, N.Y. (AP) — A fire at a factory billed as the world's biggest maker of knishes has created nationwide shock and oy for those who can't seem to find the Jewish treats anywhere.

Kvetching has been going on at delis, diners, food carts and groceries since the six-week-long shortage began, but lovers of the square, fried, doughy pillows of pureed potatoes may not have to go without much longer. The factory promises an end to the knish crunch by Thanksgiving, which coincides with the start of Hanukkah.

"Our customers ... are calling us saying they are literally searching supermarkets and stores and they're all asking when we'll be back," Stacey Ziskin Gabay, one of the owners of the 92-year-old Gabila's Knishes, which sells about 15 million knishes a year.

A fire Sept. 24 at the Gabila's plant in Copiague, Long Island, damaged the machinery that makes the company's biggest seller — "The Original Coney Island Square Knish," which also come filled with kasha or spinach.

Gabila's, which also makes matzoh balls, blintzes and latkas, sells the knishes both online and at retail outlets around the country, with New York, Florida and California leading the sales.

"For the last month I haven't had any knishes — my heart is broken," said Carol Anfuso, a native New Yorker who has been without a knish to nosh since the BJ's Wholesale store near her Atlanta home suddenly stopped stocking them.

But Anfuso didn't learn of the shortage until she visited her sister for lunch at the Pastrami King restaurant in Merrick, Long Island, and found that it was out of stock, too.

Pastrami King owner Joe Yamali said he normally sells about 2,000 knishes a month.

"It brings you back to your childhood and they're just so delicious," Yamali said. "Gabila is square and fried. You bite into it and the potato oozes out. It's very good."

Katz's Delicatessen, the 125-year-old landmark on Manhattan's Lower East Side, ordinarily sells about 6,000 knishes a month.

"I usually get four to take home," grumbled Brooklyn native Forrest Gurl. "Their crunchiness, their hard corners, the mustard and sauerkraut you put on them. You can't beat a knish."

Like most places, the round, baked version is still available. But Gurl harrumphed a familiar sentiment of knish devotees: "Who gets round knishes?"

Jesse Hochberg, a retired IT employee, didn't know there was a shortage until he got to the Katz's counter.

"I miss them," he said. "It's something I grew up with. I like the taste, sliced with mustard. ... I always look for them, and I haven't seen them recently."

Katz's chef Kenny Kohn has grown weary of explaining the shortage to customers. Along with the pastrami sandwiches, he serves up a typical New York attitude to the ongoing complaints.

"Get over it! Get a life! It's just a knish."

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