Challah has always been popular, according to cookbook author, podcaster and CJN food blogger Norene Gilletz.

In the last five or six years, Gilletz has been leading a lot of community challah bakes. “I’ve braided challah in front of 2,500 people. There’s been a renewed interest in baking challah. It’s a way for people to connect to their roots,” she said.

Gilletz, a Winnipeger by birth, has fond memories of her hometown cuisine. She said she can still taste the corned beef from Oscar’s Deli, Winnipeg’s oldest Jewish restaurant. The deli has had multiple owners and locations. Larry Brown, the current owner, attributes its longevity to its good food, reasonable prices and “great rapport” with its customers. Bernstein’s Delicatessen is another popular Winnipeg eatery, according to Bernie Bellan, the publisher of the Jewish Post & News.

However, he did not know the details of the recent demise of the Sherbrook Street Deli, which closed in 2018. Given the decline of Winnipeg’s Jewish population – Bellan estimates it at 12,000 today – he surmises that the community may not have been able to sustain another Jewish deli.

While people have heralded the renewed popularity of Jewish delicatessens and Ashkenazic food, the success or failure of such enterprises depends on the sustainability of their business models, according to Sax. “It’s one thing to open a restaurant, but it’s another to run it profitably.”

The Toronto Jewish community, despite having a sizable population of 220,000, has also seen a number of Jewish restaurants close shop recently.

The last three years has seen the closure of Caplansky’s flagship store on College Street, Essen, a Jewish restaurant on Dundas Street West, and Ben and Izzie’s, a kosher delicatessen on Bathurst Street.

Rose said that operating a restaurant in Toronto is a challenge, noting that, “You’re lucky to make three to four per cent. It’s a daily struggle.”

But he stressed that converting Rose and Sons into a Jewish diner was a good business decision.

Rose and Sons, which opened in 2012, is one of five restaurants, along with two Schmaltz Appetizing shops, that he co-owns with his business partner, Robert Wilder.

Rose said that all his restaurants, including the Schmaltz shops, reflect a part of his personal history and who he is.

For Rose, this authenticity and personal connection is critical: “Any time you do something that’s part of you, it has to be more successful. It’s second nature.”

Schwartz’s Deli in Montreal, as it was in 1983. ALAN KAUFMAN (CANADIAN JEWISH ARCHIVES) PHOTO

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