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Shake Shack Opens in Brooklyn
City Initiatives Helped Popular Upscale Hot Dog-Burger Chain

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DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN — High-profile restaurateur Danny Meyer's Shake Shack started in Madison Square Park in Manhattan before spreading to open outlets elsewhere in Manhattan, along with Citi Field, Connecticut, Miami and even Dubai.

"But now," said Mayor Michael Bloomberg, "he's finally hit the big time — Brooklyn!" "Bravo," said Borough President Marty Markowitz, waiting in the wings.

The mayor, Markowitz, Small Business Commissioner Rob Walsh and others were in town for the opening of the new Shake Shack at Adams and Willoughby streets in Downtown Brooklyn. Meyer was unavailable, but his firm, Union Square Hospitality Group, was represented by David Swinghammer and Randy Garutti.

For those who have never been to a Shake Shack, the chain eatery can best be described as an upscale hot dog and hamburger stand. Your typical roadside hot dog and hamburger stand, however, doesn't have such Shake Shake specialties as a vegetarian "'Shroom Burger," a "Shack-Cago" hot dog (that has so many vegetable garnishes that it's as if it's been "dragged through the garden") or several varieties of wine.

In addition, the Brooklyn Shake Shack has three special "concretes" (types of dense frozen custard): the "Urban Lumber Shack," the "Fudge-edaboutit" and the "Borough Precedent."

In their remarks, Markowitz, Bloomberg and Walsh revealed that Shake Shack's management had plenty of help from the city, the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership and others in setting up their new outlet. For example, 50 of the 75 new jobs in the Brooklyn location were filled with the help of the city's Workforce1 Career Centers.

Workforce1, part of the city's Department of Small Business Services, matches local businesses looking for employees with unemployed and under-employed New Yorkers. It also holds job fairs and sponsors workforce training.

Bloomberg also talked about the growth of Downtown Brooklyn in general. "Downtown Brooklyn has 30 times the number of residents it had 10 years ago," he said. "I don't know it it's a coincidence, but that's around the time that Marty Markowitz took over as borough president.

"I've never seen anyone better in the role of borough president than Marty. I've seen several who are as good, but none who are better," he said.

As examples of the growth of Downtown Brooklyn, Bloomberg mentioned Citi Point, Atlantic Yards, the Marriott Hotel, the recent opening of the bottom two floors of the Municipal Building to retail stores and more.

Addressing the topic of the city's choice of the Cornell-Technion Roosevelt Island-based proposal for a high-tech college over NYU's competing Downtown Brooklyn-based proposal, Markowitz showed his generosity by saying that it was good for the city as a whole. He expressed hope that the NYU plan, which would employ the use of the vacant MTA building at 370 Jay St., would be next for consideration by the city.

In addition to Shake Shack, Meyer is known as the proprietor of the Union Square Café, the Gramercy Tavern, the restaurants at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum, and other high-profile eateries. Garutti said Meyer is definitely looking into bringing a full-service restaurant to Brooklyn.