



PHOTO BY JOE SHYMANSKI

# Good Stuff!

SPIKE MENDELSON DISCUSSES HIS NEW EATERY AND 'TOP CHEF'

By Alfredo Flores

Spike Mendelsohn loved being around his grandfather Sunny Nakis' kitchen. Sunny had many restaurants in Montreal — his most famous was The Toit Rouge by Olympic Stadium — and young Spike absorbed everything he could. With his work at his parent's Pepin Restaurant in St. Petersburg, Florida, (busboy, dishwasher, pinch-hitting as a cook when short staffed), Spike grew up in the restaurant biz. His love for the culinary arts has sent him around the world and landed him a spot on this season's "Top Chef." Through it all, he always fondly recalled Sunny's catchphrase whenever he liked something, "Ah! That's goooood stuff!"

From that phrase sprung a brand name, a new restaurant concept and a future burger franchise; Mendelsohn's "pilot" Good Stuff Eatery is tentatively set to open in Eastern Market in June with future plans to open five more in the region over the next two years and 50 nationwide over the next decade.

"We figured that was a great name and it just kinda stuck," says Mendelsohn, the very opinionated, brash, fedora-sporting cheftestant on "Top Chef Chicago."

Mendelsohn lives in New York where he's chef de cuisine at Tribeca's new hotspot Drew Nieporent's Mai House — one of the New York Times' top 10 restaurants — but he has strong DC ties since his sister moved to Capitol Hill six years ago and his parents moved there two years ago. The family bought the storefront that will house Good Stuff and its Sunnyside Group, LLC corporate offices — named after Sunny, who always looked at the

bright side of things — a year ago without knowing what to do with the building. Ideas were thrown around, and they decided on opening a burger / shake joint that would fill the void in the area for a quality, affordable spot to get comfort food.

"I saw Five Guys grow pretty quickly in this area," Mendelsohn says. "I do like their burgers, but I find their burgers a little too greasy. It's a heart attack waiting to happen. You kind of feel like going to the gym afterwards. That's what I don't want you guys to feel when you come over to my place. I want you to feel good about eating my burger. You're going to feel good about eating a really tasty burger."

Mendelsohn is not known for biting his tongue. He got into a fight with Top Chef teammates, who vetoed making his butternut squash. The group eventually went with Zoi Antonitsas's under-seasoned carpaccio. Antonitsas was eliminated from the contest, and her girlfriend, Jen Biesty, accused Spike of throwing Antonitsas "under a bus."

Harsh.

Mendelsohn also experimented with Vietnamese food on the show — something he's done since his travels to Vietnam as a student and his experience at the Vietnamese Mai House. Good Stuff will feature the Vietnamese staple, bahn mi — which is usually served in a baguette, but in Mendelsohn's burger form features an organic beef patty with habañero aioli, fresh herbs, lettuce and pickled daikon.

"I definitely wanted to bring the heat, the pickling, the fresh herbs on this one," says Mendelsohn.

The house burger is the aptly named Good Stuff Melt — which will feature Mendelsohn's "secret Good Stuff sauce on it" — a mix of molasses, homemade mayo and a few more ingredients Mendelsohn wasn't at liberty to reveal (hence the "secret" sauce) and a special locally-made potato bun.

Another item Mendelsohn was clearly excited about is the interestingly named "Five Napkin" egg, bacon and cheese burger on a brioche bun — "a burger with cheese

and a fried egg with bacon. It's so good I could have one right now," he says, his mouth nearly salivating.

For those not in the mood for burgers, there'll be a handful of wedge salads (iceberg lettuce heads cut into wedge-like quarters), one having a poached egg on it, another featuring Greek ingredients, another with blue cheese and red onion. He says, "I really want to bring the wedge salad back." The Greek wedge is an ode to his ancestry — both his grandparents hail from the tiny Greek isle of Kefalonia, where Mendelsohn vacations and visits family.

There'll be a few draft beers and a selection of wine available, fresh ground coffee, Mendelsohn's Village Fries (seasoned with rosemary, thyme, and black pepper), as well as shakes ranging from his signature frozen custard shake, to a toasted marshmallow shake to a sour sop shake, and dulce de leche — all made at the creamery inside Good Stuff. Despite the quality and freshness of all the ingredients, Mendelsohn says his goal is to have everybody out the door at \$11 for a burger, fries and a drink.

He also recognizes that there is quite the buzz going around all based on his instant celebrity chef status as a result of the show.

"I know I wouldn't be doing this interview if I wasn't on 'Top Chef,'" the 27-year-old admits. "This restaurant business is cutthroat and it's tough to get ahead, especially being a young chef. If you're young and very ambitious and passionate about this business, ['Top Chef' is] a great way to launch a career. It doesn't necessarily mean you're the next best chef in the world, but it definitely gets your name out there." **OT**

## Good Stuff Eatery - Opens June 1

300 Penn Ave. SE (next to Cosi)

Washington, DC 20003

Eastern Market metro

202-543-8222

[www.goodstuffeatery.com](http://www.goodstuffeatery.com) (menu to be revealed online in the summer)

[www.spikethechef.com](http://www.spikethechef.com)

Here's a sampling of the selection of the food that will be part of Good Stuff Eatery once it opens in June.

### GOOD STUFF MELT

A handcrafted natural beef burger topped with Vermont cheddar and muenster cheese, fire grilled Vidalia onions, 'shrooms and Good Stuff sauce.

### BIG STUFF BACON MELTDOWN

A double all natural beef patty, lotsa maple bacon, Vermont cheddar, ruby red tomato, lettuce and pickles.

### THE GREEK WEDGE

A crispy, crunchy wedge of Iceberg lettuce and farm fresh greens topped with ruby red tomatoes, cucumbers, green onions, kalamata olives, feta cheese, freshly snipped dill, toasted sesame seeds and a virgin olive oil vinaigrette. You can "Shun the Bun" and have a beef and turkey patty with your wedge.



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