



Photos by James Woodcock

The downtown Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwich store offers fresh sandwiches to enjoy on site or delivered, fast.

JIMMY JOHN'S GOURMET SANDWICHES

JIMMY JOHN'S WILDLY POPULAR SANDWICHES DELIVER A FRESH, FUN AND FAMOUSLY FAST OPTION FOR DOWNTOWN DINERS.

BY ALLYN HULTENG

**THIRTY SECONDS.
THAT'S ALL IT TOOK FOR JIM YELEY TO
BECOME A JIMMY JOHN'S FAN.
"THAT WAS SIX YEARS AGO, AND I STILL
REMEMBER THAT SANDWICH," YELEY
SAID.**

Yeley had traveled to Pittsburgh with his family to attend his nephew's wedding. One afternoon, with time to kill, the group strolled into a Jimmy John's sandwich shop and ordered lunch.

"It was delicious. I remember saying 'we need one of these in Billings.'"

Yeley was so impressed, he looked into opening a store in Billings. But the franchise wasn't yet available in Montana.

Four years later, an unexpected event led Yeley to check on the franchise opportunity again.

"After 25 years, I was laid off my job at a trucking company. Turns out, the timing couldn't have been better," Yeley said.

The Jimmy John's franchise had just opened in Montana, and Yeley decided to go for it.

LOCATION, LOCATION

Location is critical to Jimmy John's brand managers, so much so that franchise representatives travel to each market to help select the site. After consulting with the franchise team, Yeley opened a Jimmy John's store on Billings' West End.

The first store was an instant hit. Within six months of opening, Yeley began planning a second location.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Yeley's son, Jeff, had been a successful landscape designer for the better part of three years. But when business at his father's store began to swell, Jeff offered to help.

"I started working behind the counter and just loved it," Jeff said. "It wasn't long before I decided I liked it better than my full-time job."

Six months later, Jeff quit his job to join the business.

Jeff quickly learned all aspects of the store, and took the lead in opening the second location.

Jim and Jeff initially scouted locations further west by Shiloh Crossing and in the Heights. But it wasn't long before Jeff began taking a serious look at a space in the newly renovated Babcock building downtown.

Both Jeff and Jim liked the downtown atmosphere, and they knew no one else in the area offered the equivalent of the Jimmy John's product and price point seven days a week. But it took a persistent effort to convince the franchise to approve locating the store in the historic building.

"Jimmy John's is highly particular about their brand. Everything – from how the tiles are cut to where the nails go into the wall – is prescribed," Yeley said.

The project was further complicated by the fact that the Babcock is designated as an historic building. As such, the historical society sets certain requirements for maintaining the original character of the building. It was a delicate balance to satisfy both the franchise managers and the historical society. In the end, both groups made compromises, paving the way for the downtown Jimmy John's store to become the most unique store in the country.



Located inside the historic Babcock building, the ceiling was fitted with original tin tiles salvaged during the renovation project.



Jeff Yeley (left) and Jim Yeley own and manage the downtown Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwich shop along with their first store located on Billings' West End.



Jimmy John's is known for its delicious, freshly-baked bread.



The store offers ample seating, or customers can have their order delivered, fast and free.

HIP MEETS HISTORIC

The first hint of historic is in the store's exterior. The outside fascia was replicated to match the original design by using molds found in the building's basement during renovation. The store's outdoor signage was also modified to reflect the downtown setting. In place of the usual large, flat vehicular sign, a lighted medallion-style pedestrian sign hangs over the sidewalk.

From the street, passersby can look through the large wall of windows into the hip, brightly lit store. Inside, bright red accent tiles and fun, funky signs create a lively, urban vibe. The store's spacious interior is enhanced by the unusually high ceiling – a hallmark of historic buildings.

"The ceiling is covered with stamped tin tiles that were salvaged during the renovation project," Yeley said.

There were also challenges with retro-fitting the space. One of the challenges was an unlevel floor, which sloped a full seven inches from the street side entry to the back of the kitchen.

"Our contractor, Eric Hulteng, was awesome," Jeff said. "It wasn't easy. From dealing with the corporate offices to working with the preservation people, he pulled everything together, got it done and we opened on time."

THE JIMMY JOHN'S EXPERIENCE

According to Yeley, there are sandwich shops and then there's Jimmy John's.

"Jimmy John's is known for three things," he said. "Quality of ingredients – including freshly-baked bread – speed and delivery. Our customers get a delicious sandwich prepared exactly as they want in thirty seconds."

Fresh ingredients are key. Prepping begins at 5 a.m.; vegetables are chopped and bread is freshly baked on site.

Everything is geared to speed. "We make your sandwich in thirty seconds. And if you have a meeting and need catering that day, you can call us at 10 a.m. and we'll deliver a platter at 11 a.m.," Yeley said. "We like to call ourselves the 'King of Last-Minute Catering.'"

Delivery is another Jimmy John's hallmark. "You'll see us riding bicycles downtown. We'll deliver a single sandwich or lunch for a crowd," Yeley said.

Diners who opt to eat in the store will enjoy a lively environment. Banter flows back and forth between the friendly staff while music plays in the background.

"It's all part of the Jimmy John's experience," Yeley noted.

For owners Jim and Jeff, the downtown store has been a terrific success. "This is a fun place to be," Yeley said. "We're happy to be here and contributing to the downtown atmosphere." Best of all, Yeleys are bringing the Jimmy John's experience to downtown diners.

"You've just got to try it – see the fun and experience the food," Yeley said. "You'll be back!"

Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches
122 No. Broadway
281-8282
www.jimmyjohns.com

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