

## Don't Judge York Road by Its Cover By Riley McCarthy

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of York Road? For me, I immediately visualize Belvedere Square. On the corner of East Belvedere Avenue and York Road, this 100,000 square foot paradise encapsulates everything your taste buds desire. The market is home to fourteen unique restaurants, each providing something suited to your cravings. The market refutes the preconceived notions of York Road through its mouth-watering atmosphere and sense of community. As North Baltimore's central gathering spot, Belvedere Square is at the crossroads of it all.

I remember my first experience at Belvedere vividly. I was in my first semester here at Loyola and my Messina class gathered for dinner before attending a movie at The Senator Theatre. I had no expectations for what I was about to experience. To me, it was just another ordinary restaurant in Baltimore. I was wrong. The brilliantly lit letters spelling "BELVEDERE" towered

over the building creating a radiance across the tightly-packed parking lot. As I opened one of the many doors to the market, a myriad of smells and sights hit me. The din sound of clinking dishes caught my ear but was masked by the sweetness of laughter and distant music. Wafts of slowly-simmered pizza sauce, buttery Maine lobster rolls, and smoked seafood delicacies crept up my nose. To my left, I saw hand-shaped,

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hearth-baked bread and pastries at Atwater's. Straight ahead was cooked Asian comfort food at Eiji Ramen. To my right, were vibrant juices at PlantBar. Personally, I found myself attracted to Ceriello's and their homemade Italian entrees. My dish of choice was pesto pasta. The ambrosial scent of basil and garlic engaged my senses. The delectable taste combined with the flavors of parmesan and roasted pine nuts delightfully struck my mouth. Following my meal, I found my way over to the Prigel

Family Creamery. The menu towered above me displaying an array of mouthwatering flavors. I was mesmerized. As my hands clasped the frigid cup of the chocolate coconut ice cream that was presented to me, I felt complete. My evening at Belvedere revealed a small piece of Baltimore culture for the first time.

When you walk into Belvedere, the first thing you'll notice are the people. Everyone is gathered in thanksgiving around rustic, wooden tables, tin barstools, and scattered high tops. The choir of voices immediately strikes your ear. Distant conversation captures your attention and pulls you into the bustling excitement. Food binds us together in a sense of communion. My mom has always encouraged my family to eat dinner together at least three times a week. Amongst our busy schedules, we attempt to find time to eat as a family. She believes there is something special about setting aside time to be with one another during our hectic week. Dinner has always been therapeutic for my family: an excuse to talk and reflect on our day. Although the act of eating together requires very little of us, it is invariably one of the happiest parts of my day. Our shared meal is a 45-minute getaway I look forward to every week.

Belvedere promotes this idea with an atmosphere that sanctuary that creates a sense



The community gathers around a Belvedere favorite, Neopol Smokery.

distracts you from the everyday, ordinary stress we face. Employees welcome you to their stands, dinner tables unify locals, and the array of food choices greet your senses. The market is not only a launchpad for outstanding food but is a sanctuary that creates a

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sense of community. Belvedere is a unifier for all types of people, no matter what race, age or gender. Instantly, you feel

welcomed into a second home composed of fourteen glorious restaurants. Edward Maxy has worked behind the deli at Ceriallo's for eight years. He describes, “We have many regulars...Belvedere brings people from everywhere. We get people from New York, Florida, down by the Harbor. We have a lot of diversity within our customers. They are from all walks of life.” This is apparent the moment you step foot into the restaurants.

When I first decided to come to Loyola, one of my biggest concerns was what the community was like around me. York Road doesn't necessarily have the best reputation and my parents were apprehensive of my decision in coming to this area. I was almost positive

that I wouldn't be spending any time in Govans. What I have to come to learn in a year's time here is that the 3-mile strip of restaurants, neighborhoods, and shops is more than the reputation it has been given over the years. Finding Belvedere highlighted the diversity present in the Baltimore community. In Rafael Alvarez's article “Who are we?” he claims, “People think Baltimore is a city of blacks and whites. In a three-block stretch of York Road, things are a lot more colorful—and complicated—than that.” I have come to find the truth in this throughout my first year at Loyola. If you really want to get to know a community, you need to get to know its people. Belvedere attracts all cultures and tastes, offering something

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for everyone. Hannah Aebli, a freshman at Loyola described, “I can't put into words the exact feeling I had when I first went to Belvedere. I immediately felt welcomed. It was the first place I found off-campus that made me feel a part of the Baltimore community. The food was only an added bonus.”

As you enter into your first year, know that Loyola is just one aspect of the Baltimore community. Try to be open to York Road and immerse yourself in the rich culture it has to offer. Belvedere is just a single com-

ponent that unifies this community, but it provides an amazing opportunity to meet new people and appreciate flavorful food. This is a place where people come together as neighbors, not customers.



Mason's Lobster Rolls, a seafood delicacy featured at Belvedere.