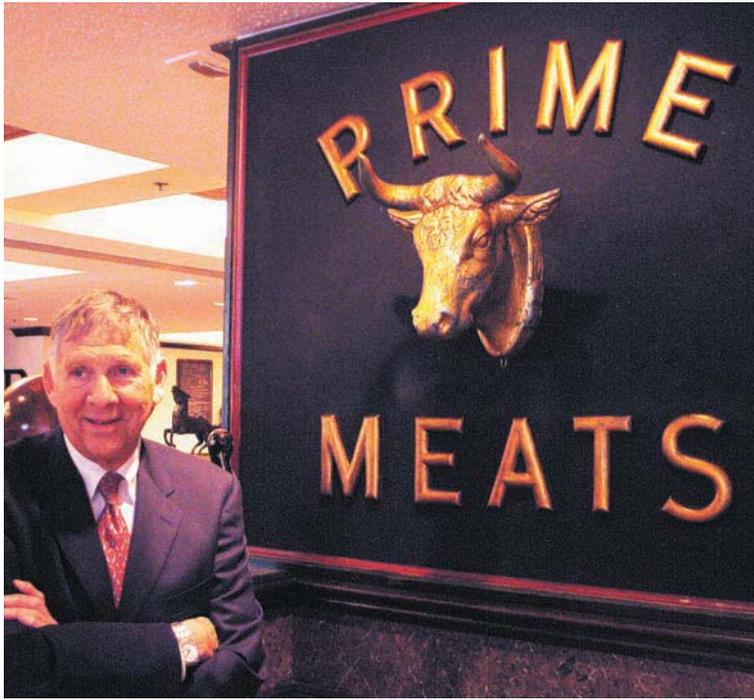


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Ben (Bennett) Benson named his restaurant in New York after his father Benjamin. It is considered one of the top 100 independent restaurants in the United States.

New York Jewish restaurateur thrives in the theatre district

Mike Cohen
Quebec Bureau Chief

NEW YORK - When Ben Benson graduated with a BA in biology from Bucknell University, a private liberal arts school in Central Pennsylvania, he had every intention of following in the his father's footsteps to become a doctor.

However, when his eyesight waned, he fell back on his stellar palate to forge a highly successful career in the hospitality industry.

Benson never let his visual impairment stand in his way. He and his former business partner Alan Stillman operated a succession of successful nightlife spots and restaurants, including New York City's famed 'Days of the Week' venues (Tuesday's, Wednesday's, Thursday's, and T.G.I. Friday's), as well as The Grand Cafe, and Smith & Wollensky.

In 1982, he struck out on his own to create his eponymous steakhouse, which is widely recognized as one of the country's best. It is called Ben Benson's, but was actually named after his late father.

"My dad was Benjamin and I am Bennett," he told the *Jewish Tribune* in an interview.

Ben Benson's Steak House

(www.benbensons.com) is one of the top 100 independent restaurants in America.

Manhattanites and visitors rub elbows with celebrities, politicians, sports stars and business executives, over huge juicy steaks, filet mignon and fantastic fish selections.

The restaurant is in the theatre district, at 123 West 52nd St.

Ben Benson's fills the two roomy floors with casual elegance and charm. This handsome, clubby restaurant is home to many regulars (many with brass name plaques mounted on the wainscoted walls such as Schwartz and Grossman).

Now legally blind, Benson remains a hands-on owner. He needed no assistance to come to our table, which included a few steps. He created the menu himself, offering only USDA Prime steaks and chops and premium-quality poultry and seafood. Benson tastes and approves every dish, including the bread.

The restaurant serves huge portions, including a gigantic baked potato. In terms of salads, there are a wide variety, notably the Ben Benson chopped salad. As for side orders, the mashed potatoes are excellent and the key lime pie should top your choices for dessert.

The restaurant is also noted for its exclusively seasoned steak sauce.

A proud Jew, Benson makes sure to have matzah at each table during Passover. In fact, it has become a tradition for him at that time of year to come in each morning and make *matzah brei* (fried matzah) for the staff, most of whom are not Jewish but appreciate it just the same.

Benson is now forced to use a white cane and can no longer walk from his apartment to the restaurant on his own. He has a voice adapted computer and uses a special machine to enlarge print for reading.

A widower who had no children, Benson remarried five years ago to a woman with three children. The youngest, Zachary, is working in the business.

Ben Benson's Restaurant gained international attention a few years ago when *The Late Show with David Letterman* decided to give out gift certificates to members of the studio audience who participated in special contests. It was the kind of publicity money could not buy.

"And they paid for the certificates," he said. "Letterman himself has been to the restaurant."

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv have outranked all other Middle Eastern cities in the World's Best Awards, which are published annually in *Travel + Leisure's* August issue.

Jerusalem ranked first and Tel Aviv second in *Travel + Leisure's* World's Best Awards, with Cairo placing third. This is the second consecutive year that

Jerusalem, Tel Aviv voted best cities to visit in Middle East

JERUSALEM - Jerusalem and Tel Aviv have been voted the best cities to visit in the Middle East by readers of *Travel + Leisure*, one of America's leading travel magazines.

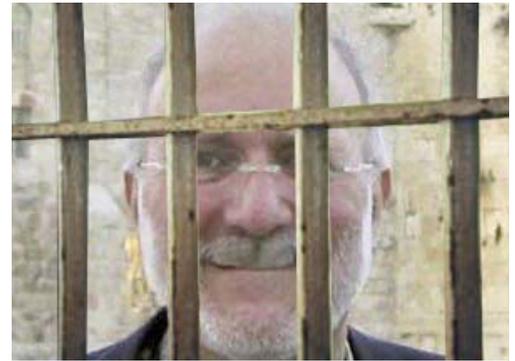
Gross visited Cuba at least five times, court document shows

NEW YORK - Jailed American Jewish contractor Alan Gross visited Cuba at least five times in one year to set up wireless Internet connections, according to a report citing leaked court documents.

The report last Thursday by *The Associated Press* (AP) comes two days after Juan Lamigueiro of the Cuban interests section in Washington posted a letter on the Cuban foreign ministry website saying that "the Cuban government has engaged the US government on its willingness to find a humanitarian solution to the case of Mr. Alan Gross on a reciprocal humanitarian basis."

The statement is believed to be referring to the so-called 'Cuban Five,' spies arrested in the United States in 1998, which Cuba has been rumoured to have asked the US to swap in exchange for Gross.

Gross visited Cuba five times in 2009, the year he was arrested, and his movements there had been tracked since 2004, according to a filing with the court, apparently from Gross' sentencing, AP



Jailed American Jewish contractor Alan Gross behind bars in Cuba early in his incarceration. Now he is said to be in ill health and has lost more than 100 pounds.

reported. The document was published on the US-based blog Cafe Fuerte, and its authenticity has been neither confirmed nor denied. The document alleges that Gross recruited other Americans to help bring restricted telecommunications equipment into Cuba.

Gross is serving a 15-year prison sentence in Cuba. He has been jailed since he was arrested in 2009 as he was leaving Cuba.

Gross' family and US State Department officials say that Gross was in the country on a US Agency for International

Development contract to help the country's 1,500 Jews communicate with other Jewish communities using the Internet. The main Jewish groups in Cuba have denied any contact with or knowledge of Gross or the program.

He reportedly is in poor health and has lost more than 100 pounds.

Gross was not included on a list released last month of nearly 3,000 prisoners whom Cuban leader Raoul Castro said he would release on humanitarian grounds.

- JTA

US military chief calls meetings with Israeli leaders 'very good'

JERUSALEM - Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. joint military chiefs of staff, called whirlwind meetings with Israeli leaders "very good" without offering any details.

"We have many interests in common in the region in this very dynamic time, and the more we can continue to engage each other, the better off we'll all be," Dempsey said Friday night after 24 hours of meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense

Minister Ehud Barak, President Shimon Peres and his counterpart, Benny Gantz.

The talks helped to "advance a shared understanding of the security situation in the region," he reportedly said.

Dempsey was expected to press Israel not to strike Iran. It was Dempsey's first visit to Israel since becoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in September.

Israel and the United States last week delayed their largest ever anti-mis-

sile exercise; it is believed that tensions over Iran was one of the major reasons for the delay.

Israel reportedly told Dempsey during the visit that it will give Washington 12 hours notice before launching an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

During his visit, Dempsey visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial on the 70th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference that implemented the Nazis' "Final Solution."



Raising cancer awareness

Elizabeth Erlich of the U'Chaim Cancer Support Group for Jewish Women (third from left) was a featured speaker at a recent luncheon held by Club Masada of Na'amat Toronto. Shown here with Elizabeth Erlich are Club Masada members (from the left) Fanny Pillersdorf, Shirley Train, Tillie Margolis, Pearl Mekler and Pearl Shore. U'Chaim, a project of National Council of Jewish Women of Canada-Toronto Section, provides confidential peer support to Jewish women with cancer and also works to raise cancer awareness through its speakers' bureau.