

# Business Beat

## At Norwood Store, Cigars Are an Art



Photo by Lindsay Armstrong

**FRANCISCO ROSARIO** of Rosario's Cigars on Gun Hill Road.

By **LINDSAY ARMSTRONG**

Francisco Rosario sits at a worn wooden desk behind a storefront window, transforming a pile of flat, brown leaves into cigars as thick as Italian sausages. He holds the butt of a cigar snugly between his lips as he works, tearing, smoothing, and rolling the fragrant leaves. Our Lady of Fatima, emblazoned on a gold medal hanging from his neck, presides over the ritual.

Rosario, 52, has been making cigars since his childhood in the Dominican Republic. In spite of chatter to the contrary, he insists that Dominican cigars are the best.

“Cubans are famous because no one can get them here,” he said in a mix of Spanish and English. “But Dominican cigars are better. They have two kinds of tobacco. We have eight.”

After moving to New York at age 34, Rosario dreamed of opening his own cigar shop. Eight years later, that dream became a reality. Rosario's Cigars, on East Gun Hill Road in Norwood, is now celebrating its 10th anniversary.

The shop, manned by Francisco and his brother Leonardo, is one of only a handful of places in the city that makes cigars the traditional way. Over the years, Rosario's has built up a loyal following, including former Mayor Rudy Giuliani, whose framed picture hangs on the wall.

Norwood resident Gregory Davis might not be as recognizable as Giuliani, but he is also a Rosario's regular and an avid fan.

“They are number one,” he said. “I send all my friends here. The flavor, the tobacco — even their light cigars, which I don't usually like, are good.”

At 11 a.m. on a recent rainy Wednesday, the shop maintained a steady flow of customers. Some simply dashed in and out. Others lingered in the wood-paneled room in the back, where the shelves are filled with neat rows of open cigar boxes.

Cigars are the main draw, but Rosario's is more than a place to buy an expertly rolled smoke. The shop has become something of a neighborhood clubhouse.

Throughout the day, people stop in to sink into one of three over-stuffed leather sofas, relax, and enjoy a cigar. The topic of conversation often turns to baseball: the Yankees, for native New Yorkers, or the *Aguilas Cibaeñas* for Dominican-born fans.

Perhaps this is the real draw of Rosario's Cigars — it is a place where the hectic pace of life slows down, if only for a moment.

“A cigar is all about time,” said first-time customer Robert DeLeon, 43, a construction worker. “And I never have any time anymore.”

With that, he takes his purchase and walks back out into the hustle and bustle of the Bronx.

From behind his desk, Francisco Rosario nods in agreement and turns back to his work.

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