The word spread across a local Jewish residents’ text chain faster than a warm knife through cream cheese.

“Mensch’s is open! A day early!”

While the official opening is not until Wednesday, co-owners Jack DeMar, Eric Kogan and Kiki Eliopoulos saw people showing up on Tuesday, and then put the word out on social media … come on over!
1608 Chicago Ave. former site of the Golden Olympic restaurant.

It was a soft opening, like a soft piece of rye bread on a pastrami sandwich.

By lunchtime, Mensch’s was full.
“Our Love Letter to the Jewish Deli” is how the owner/manager trio describes the restaurant.

Friends since their childhood in Wilmette, their menu states that “We grew up noshing on lox & bagel spreads, ordering matzo ball soup to go, and begging for a black and white cookie at the checkout counter. We thought Evanston was missing a place like that.”
The “Three Menschketeers” even went to New York City to scout deli concepts.

Chicago also has an illustrious Jewish deli history, presented last year in an exhibit at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie.

There were once 120 Jewish delis in the Chicago metropolitan area, back about a century ago.

Now there are only about 40.

DeMar says the delis he remembers from childhood “seem to be fading away, as people pass on, and children don’t want to run the family business.”
But in DeMar’s case, he’s perpetuating that business.

DeMar’s great-grandfather established the (now closed) chain of DeMar’s Coffee Shops/Grills in the area, and his grandfather opened the Oak Tree Restaurant in Chicago, where Jack “worked in high school.”

DeMar already owns Pono Ono poke restaurant and Picnic carryout, both just a bagel’s throw from Mensch’s on Chicago Avenue.
Last year, a weekends-only Mensch’s pop-up, operating out of Picnic, proved that demand for a Jewish deli was real.

Kogan was working in finance and real estate, but his long friendship with DeMar led to their “strategic partnership,” fueled by a “passion for food and hospitality.”

Besides the food, Mensch’s brings back part of the old days, when the Jewish deli was a gathering space for those who could not afford other places, or were not allowed in.

Certainly the socioeconomic situation has changed over 100 years, but the art of conversation over a corned beef sandwich and a pickle has not.

People at Mensch’s talked to each other, talked about the food, talked with the staff, and maybe even talked about the photographs of the DeMar, Kogan, and Eliopoulos families that line the walls.

Customer Spenser Cardenas grew up in Ocean City, Maryland, and says he didn’t have much deli when he was a kid.
He pronounced the food “quite good. I’m enjoying it.”

His fellow Kellogg business school student, Betsy Day, is from near Boston, where Jewish delis have existed for decades.

“This is definitely better than what you can get in Boston,” Day proclaimed.

Desserts are coming.

Eliopoulos, who is Mensch’s pastry chef, says sweets are an “extremely important” component of the deli experience, but the trio wants to get the food portion totally off the ground first.

Her favorite? “Auntie Joanie’s Almond Torte. It’s gluten free at that! And there is a real “Auntie Joanie.”

Mensch’s has added about 20 jobs to the downtown economy.

“We got very lucky with the staff,” Eliopoulos says. They found people who are “very kind,” but also people who, DeMar says, have “big personalities.”
Not New York big, which can include brusque, but colorful big.

While Mensch’s has only been open one day, there’s a chance that the seven-days-a-week, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. schedule might expand to some evenings.

Dr. Brown’s? This place is definitely legit.

There’s also the chance that more dining establishments are on the way.

“Together I think we can grow this place into more than one restaurant,” Kogan notes.

For now, though, the focus is on Mensch’s official grand opening.

“We’re buckling up for tomorrow,” says Demar.

And one more thing, while the black and white cookies are not on hand yet, they will be soon.

You just read it … in … black and white.