

THE BODEGA BROTHERHOOD

This bustling Bronx convenience store serves the community with the help of locals, regulars and many, many siblings.

By *Matthew Love*

IMAGINE CHEERS, BROADCAST in Spanish, with Sam serving mofongo instead of beer. That's not far from the scene at Los Hermanos Meat Market in Mott Haven. The bustling 23-year-old corner store has a full deli, a meat counter, a bustling hot-food table and a cooler stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables. (As part of an effort to combat obesity and diabetes in low-income communities, City Harvest and BronxWorks helped to pay for the cooler.) But beyond the fresh cilantro and the six different types of coconut milk, Los Hermanos does what only the best bodegas do: Serve their neighborhoods while creating a community of their own.

The heart of Los Hermanos is Ramon, 63, and Lidia Gomez, 59, a married couple who emigrated from the Dominican Republic in the late '80s. Since opening the shop, the Gomezes have enticed Ramon's brothers to make their way to the Bronx to stock shelves and serve sandwiches; in fact, the bodega now employs six Gomez siblings, the eponymous *hermanos* of Los Hermanos. When asked about the importance of working with family, Ramon says, with a laugh, "Other people take your

money." An easy camaraderie pervades the shop, even among the customers. On a recent Wednesday afternoon, everyone who walks through the door seemed to know someone behind the counter. A man in a fedora and leather jacket stalks the aisles and playfully hollers. A trio of teenagers chat near massive sandbags of rice before being asked to take their shaggy rescue dog, Chanel, outside. A 10-year-old wearing pink rabbit ears is handed the store's cordless phone so she could call her mom.

Neslon, a Mott Havener stopping by for chicken breast and spare ribs, sips a complimentary coffee while chatting with one of the brothers, Miguel, about the political situation in Venezuela. "I've been coming here for 23 years," he says. "I love it. It's like a family."

→ Los Hermanos Meat Market, Mott Haven (718-292-8494)

