

Kosher cons now held under lox and key

By WILLIAM SLATTERY

The Second Avenue Deli they'll never be — and even though some of them are in the Catskills, they're certainly not competing with the resort Concord.

They're state prisons — and after nearly three years of discussions between cor-

rections officials and a broad spectrum of Jewish groups, nearly half of them now offer kosher food.

That's no small matter, according to Rabbi Shmuel Spritzer, head of the Lubavitch Youth Organization. "It is not a matter of choice," Spritzer said. "An

[observant] Jew gets kosher food — or he can't eat."

In recognition of his phasing of kosher food into all 69 state facilities — a process to be completed by April — state Corrections Commissioner Thomas Coughlin will be given the group's "Love Your Fellow

Man" award Sept. 8.

"There were a lot of individuals who were literally starving themselves," said Bennett Epstein, lawyer for the Committee for Kosher Food in New York State Correctional Facilities. "Jews in prison were forced to live on carrots."

Before Coughlin instituted the kosher program, Epstein said, Jews who wanted to keep kosher in jail had to transfer to the Green Haven maximum-security facility.

That was "clearly unconstitutional," Epstein said. Jim Flateau, spokesman

for the Corrections Department, said 70 of the roughly 400 Jews housed in 28 facilities where kosher food is available have signed up for the alternative menu.

Jews represent less than 2 percent of the inmate population, he said.