

# Pizza Today™

# RISING STARS OF THE PIZZA INDUSTRY

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# STARRING QUE WIMBERLY



ALSO STARRING  
JOEY KARVELAS  
LEAH SCURTO  
NICK FRANCHI  
MARCUS MEDINA  
AUDREY KELLY  
GIOVANNI CESARANO  
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Pizza Today 2021  
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JUNE 2021

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# Share Your Success Story

**W**hat's your labor situation like? I'm willing to bet it's less than ideal. That seems to be the case for nearly every restaurant owner I've spoken to over the past year. From pizza to hot dog stands to fine dining, I hear the same story over and over and over: "No one wants to work" or "I just can't find help."

Nick Bogacz of Caliente Pizza & Draft House in Pittsburgh is one of the nation's most successful operators. Recently he was the guest on an episode of our weekly podcast, The Hot Slice, where he confessed to being at wit's end. Even he is struggling to find reliable employees. That's extra frustrating when you're in growth mode.

Understaffed, overworked and overstressed is the current status quo. Just like nearly everything else we've endured since early March of 2020, we're deep in the weeds on this one. Your sales are up, yet your labor pool is nonexistent and you're working 80 hours per week as a result.

Yet, as we emerge from the pandemic and resume something that resembles normalcy, adequate staffing levels are a necessity if we're going to grow and continue offering the level

of service for which this industry is known.

It's time to take a hard look in the mirror and evaluate your pay scale, benefits, training and retention measures. Get to the heart of what makes your employees happy and fulfilled. I believe the best brand ambassadors are enthusiastic employees. If they publicly acknowledge how great it is to work for you, others in need of a good gig will take notice. And the best way to turn your workers into evangelists for your pizzeria is to make sure your work environment is second to none.

If you have figured this out in your market and are attracting workers while everyone else is hanging the "Help Wanted" sign in desperation, you're in an enviable position. You also have an opportunity to help your peers nationwide. Shoot me an e-mail and let me know what's working for you!

Best,

**JEREMY WHITE**  
Editor in Chief  
jwhite@pizzatoday.com

## Contributors



**DANIEL P. SMITH**  
Freelance Writer

(Diversity & Inclusion, pp. 58-60)

Diversity and inclusion has quickly become something business leaders across all different sectors need to mind, and not just with lip service, but with thoughtful action and purpose. By and large, the restaurant industry is a diverse, inclusive place. The challenge today is how we build on that and how we celebrate that.



**JOHN GUTEKANST**  
Owner, Avalanche Pizza, Athens, OH  
(Smoke Points of Oil, pp. 40-41)

Oil knowledge is key to a great product. Many pizza people make sure they have the best flour, cheese, sauce and toppings but then buy inferior oils. Chefs don't talk oils very often, but they notice when their sauté pans turn black. Tired oils behave differently than fresh. Refined tired oils are runny, almost watery. Their smoke points are lower, they smell musty, they are heavy on the tongue.

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# “Real Italian” Values . . .



*President Tom Cortopassi with his youngest son Conner in one of our tomato fields in Stanislaus County, California.*



*Amerigo Cortopassi making sausage with his grandson Tom.*

I grew up learning many of the “Real Italian” values which guide our family-owned company from my Italian parents and grandparents. Values like . . . “Always work hard,” “Always do your best,” “Always keep your word,” and “Never cut corners.”

I’m especially grateful that my Nonno Amerigo passionately believed in passing along his values and traditions that he learned from his parents and grandparents while growing up in Lucca, Italy.

To our restaurateur family of customers who depend on the quality and consistency of our “Real Italian” tomato products to help in your success, you have my word that we won’t let you down!

*Tom Cortopassi*

*Tom Cortopassi  
President and Co-Owner*

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## Weekly

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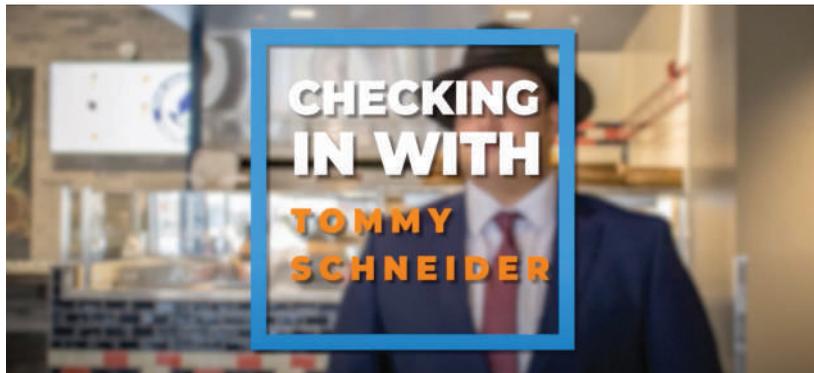
Each week, Pizza Today Weekly delivers quick-to-read business tips and recipes developed specifically for today's independent and multi-unit pizzeria operators straight to your inbox.



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## Checking In With Tommy Schneider, Tommy's Pizzeria, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Tommy gives us a look at what's happening north of the border in Winnipeg, MB, Canada. His pizzeria, Tommy's, is still in the grips of the COVID-19 restrictions that forced him to close for three months. This episode is hosted by Executive Editor Denise Greer and Creative Director Josh Keown.



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# LINDSEY YEAKLE

Lindsey Yeakle is the Gluten-Free Food Service (GFFS) Program Manager, Food Safety, for the nonprofit Gluten Intolerance Group (GIG).

Yeakle has a culinary history working at 4-star and 4-diamond rated restaurants. A celiac disease diagnosis encouraged her to attend culinary school at Indiana University of Pennsylvania Academy of Culinary Arts. In June 2016, Yeakle decided to use her background and education to help the gluten-free community by working with GIG.



## Why is it vital for pizzerias that choose to offer a gluten-free menu to get it right?

If a pizzeria is making the claim it's offering gluten-free pizza, the gluten-free community is trusting that the pizzeria is doing things properly since there is the risk of making people quite sick if it is not. It is important to think of everything involved to mitigate that risk. For example, while traditional pizzas naturally contain gluten, think of other items in the menu that do as well, such as breadsticks and breaded wings. If you're not properly following procedures to keep the gluten-free items safe from such offerings, then you run the risk of cross contact. Cross contact can be as small as a crumb, as small as a particle of flour from the gluten-containing items. It's just a minuscule amount that can be a problem for someone who has Celiac disease or a gluten intolerance. That one particle could be what makes a person very sick.

## What are the most common mistakes restaurants make preparing gluten-free foods?

One of the most common mistakes restaurants make in preparing gluten-free foods is forgetting about what is involved in safely providing that food to their guests, what has to be done safely in the

preparation of it to avoid cross contact. Things to keep in mind are that pasta must be cooked in a separate pot of clean water. Pizza crust can't sit on the same surface that a regular, traditional pizza crust sat on because it can get contamination from the gluten on that crust. It's the process of actually preparing gluten-free items where the mistakes are often happening.

## What are some best practices in preparing gluten-free items?

It is important to have a designated space where gluten-free foods are being prepared so you can make sure things are separate and safe as well as clean and sanitized. Gluten-free pizza crust should be put in a foil tin or some other container that is designated gluten-free. A foil tin is optimum because it can be disposed of and a new one can be used each time, protecting the bottom of the pizza where it's being baked from cross contact. Other best practices include changing gloves between pizzas and making sure toppings are not taken from the same containers where the traditional pizza toppings are stored. Gluten-free toppings need to be stored separately in a separate area. Another way to ensure your pizzeria is safe and trusted by gluten-free consumers is by becoming validated by an organization like our Gluten-Free

Food Service (GFFS). We're able to guide people quickly and easily through the best way to deal with gluten-free items in pizzerias. Gluten-free customers feel safest when they know a facility is validated, whether it's done with us or another organization.

## What are some of the most popular gluten-free items to introduce into a menu?

A gluten-free dessert is a great thing to offer. It benefits the gluten-free community because it's an item that's hard to find when they go out to eat. And when you do find it, it's hard to turn it down because it is so rare. It benefits the pizzeria because there is the ability to add an upcharge to drinks, appetizers and desserts. So, if you can come up with a gluten-free dessert, you can upcharge on gluten-free plus the upcharge on desserts. This great combination benefits both the gluten-free guest as well as the pizzeria. I always suggest coming up with at least one gluten-free dessert beyond a bowl of vanilla ice cream, which doesn't feel special. A great idea can be as simple as a gluten-free brownie. That's something that's easy to do and not always available at restaurants. If a pizzeria really wants to do something fun, I suggest creating dessert pizzas that are gluten-free.



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## Not So Secret Menu

**Y**ou should never have a secret menu. However, an open-secret menu is a great idea.

An open-secret menu is something that everyone could readily figure out or find. So it's not a secret at all, but it has just enough mystique to come off as a special. In-N-Out does this well with their "Animal-Style" variations of the menu. With that said, it's pretty easy to find their secret menu. If you have some special hidden menu item or nuanced specialty "Thing" that only some of your staff know about, it's time to get that into the open. If only a handful of customers know about it, then it most likely has value, and you're holding it back on sharing it. Find a fun way to show the secret

menu. Possibly hide it with a special link on your website, or explain it as the "secret menu" because it's out there, and you want people to feel special about ordering those items.

There's also the McRib approach of taking a semi-popular item and then taking it off the menu and bringing it back every now and again. This tactic gives the feeling of exclusivity, which increases the sales of this item significantly more than it would sell if it were on the menu all year. Here is my pizza approach: I have about 20 specialty pizzas, so when we get a new idea to add to the menu, one has to come off. I take the "retired" pizza and add it to my slice of the night one day of the week. I pair it with a rare

beer and make it an event that we push on social media and build a call to action that pizza would not garner otherwise.

Along with that, every time I do bring something back or add something new, it's a new advertising opportunity. If you're just about to open your restaurant and have a slew of ideas of what you want on your menu, start with the base items and slowly add each new menu item. This approach provides a new call to action each time you roll out an item. Sequential calls to action make your restaurant appear fresh and never stagnant. New items give your customers more reasons to come back to your restaurant as you start your growth. A slow menu rollout also helps a completely new staff avoid becoming overwhelmed.

For anything else you are willing to do or sell; it should be evident on your menu and website. Services like specialized pizza tours or making pizza at someone's house to selling dough balls in bulk should all be listed somewhere clear and visible. If you're willing to sell it, you should also be willing to put it on an official menu and advertise it. People will often say, "Oh, but that's something I do on the side," which means it's an idea not being utilized. If people ask without you advertising it, then there is a hungry audience for it. Customers should have the opportunity to purchase it without it being their idea. If more than once are you asked about doing something, then it should be on your menu of items or services.

A great example of this is in Vegas. Steve Wynn got asked about his linens in the Wynn Hotel so much that he went and made a whole showroom near the casino floor of everything utilized in his hotel room. That way, hotel guests and non-hotel guest shoppers could see the Wynn-at-Home products, interact with them, and potentially buy them. For most purchases, the items get sent to the customer's home. That's taking a brand signifier and making it obviously available for sale, which you should do for every conceivable product or service inside of your four walls and not keep it a secret anymore.



**MIKE BAUSCH** is the owner of Andolini's Pizzeria in Tulsa, Oklahoma. **Instagram:** @mikeybausch

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## Olive Oil Is About to Get Cool

**H**ave you ever seen a magnum of olive oil? I hadn't until last week, when I spotted one in the hands of a mysterious bearded man in a Brooklyn pizzeria. This wasn't just any mysterious bearded man, of which there are a great many to be found inside Brooklyn pizzerias ... this was Nicholas Coleman. After serving as chief Oleologist at Eataly for several years, Nick went on to preach olive oil gospel at renowned culinary institutions around the planet. Now he runs "a bespoke full-service olive oil procurement center," which sources oil from across the globe for large clients and individual customers. When I met Nick, he was dropping off a fresh bottle of olive oil he designed in collaboration with rapper/TV star Action Bronson.

That's right. Olive oil is about to get cool.

Pizzerias have been treating olive oil like an anonymous commodity for years, but there's an incredible amount of potential that's only beginning to come to fruition. In the past, all anybody ever cared about was whether or not the label said extra virgin, but that's barely an indicator of anything. As I learned from master olive miller David Garci-Aguirre, the requirements for extra virgin are so broad it's like bragging about passing a test when you only got a C-.

Have you ever sipped your olive oil? Try it right now. Does it tickle the tongue or does it burn the throat? The latter means that your oil has gone rancid. At the very

least, your oil should taste good. It should taste like olive.

Olives are fruits, so we really need to think of olive oil as fruit juice. It's best when fresh and declines with exposure to heat, light and air. Olive oil goes rancid after 12 to 18 months, so look for a packing date on your label. Then be sure to store your supply away from heat and light. You probably blast through containers of oil faster than they can spoil, but home cooks often don't realize that once a package is opened they need to consume their oil within a few months.

In pizza, we tend to value a connection to pizza's Italian origin, but quality olive oil isn't restricted to the boot. Spain, Greece, Italy and Tunisia are all huge producers, but check your bottles and you'll probably see a blended oil even if marketed as Italian. That's why you really need to go with taste instead of relying on marketing language on the label. California has some excellent oil right now with an industry some say will echo the state's success with wine. The southern hemisphere is emerging as a major player, with excellent oils coming from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Brazil.

I remember judging a pizza competition in Harlem a few years ago that pitted 50 Margherita pizzas against each other over the course of two days. You'd think it would have been hard to discriminate between one pie and the next, but I clearly remember the moment I encountered the winner. The most obvious difference was the quality olive oil the pizzaiolo used to finish the pie. Had he used an inferior oil, the pizza would have been indiscriminable from its competitors.

As all pizza makers continue to up their fermentation game, their tomato sourcing, and their cheese selection I truly believe that quality olive oil will emerge as the quiet hero of pizza flavor.



**SCOTT WIENER** is the founder of Scott's Pizza Tours in New York City and SliceOutHunger.org **Instagram:** @scottspizzatours

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## How to Retain Your Winning Team

**P**reviously, we discussed how to build a staff of servers, cooks and drivers with a winning mindset. The unspoken question is this: how do you retain them? You're not alone if you can't find anyone to hire right now, making it so important to keep your team together.

Two concepts come to mind when talking about retention: communication and appreciation.

### Communication

A staff likes to feel like they know what's going on and they have all the pertinent information to do their job. No one enjoys chaotic, confusing workplaces, and most of those are characterized by a lack of communication. Regularly updating employees on the latest pizzeria news keeps them in the

know and maintains a team-focused environment.

At Caliente, we use the GroupMe messaging app to communicate with all employees at once. We post updates, new menu procedures and important changes. We also host monthly meetings for staff, as well as biweekly meetings for the managers. These meetings are written in stone on the schedule and occur no matter what — they are the lifeblood of our internal communication strategy. Lastly, never underestimate a phone call or talking to a staff member in person during a trying and difficult moment.

A well-trained and informed staff learns to appreciate the workplace — but that relationship should be reciprocal.

### Appreciation

Once the staff is in the know, they should feel more entrenched in the job. But how do you get them to care even more and stick around awhile? By showing how much you care about them, too.

We put significant effort into employee appreciation, beginning with two big, all-staff events each year. One is our annual holiday party, as we close all stores early and gather at a nice venue for a catered event with all expenses paid, including alcohol. At the event, we give away random door prizes and then we hand out our “Caliente Awards” that, of course, include giant trophies. The other big annual event is our Summer Picnic, as we invite employees and their families to an outdoor party. We host it at a local park with giant bouncy houses and live entertainment. These types of events build camaraderie in a stress-free situation.

Throughout the year, we implement smaller-scale appreciation efforts, such as our Employee of the Month program, in which a valued and talented employee is awarded a gift card and has their photo placed on the wall. We also have a Manager of the Month program, which includes a gift card, paid vacation day and t-shirt celebrating the achievement. In addition, we give out years-of-service shirts, in which employees receive a special t-shirt noting their years of employment on the sleeve.

Sometimes, nothing is better than an honest “thank you.” As an owner or manager, your words carry weight, and specifically telling employees what they did well goes a long way. Of course, one of the most powerful ways that you can thank an employee is through their pay and pay increases — and that balancing act is what we'll tackle next month. ■



**NICK BOGACZ** is the founder and president of Caliente Pizza & Draft House in Pittsburgh. **Instagram:** @caliente\_pizza

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## FIDDLE ME THIS

A Fiddlehead is probably an ingredient that you have never heard of. The fronds of a young fern, fiddleheads are available in the spring. This is a vegetable and I prefer to bake or sauté them with a little salt, pepper and extra virgin olive oil before adding them to pizza. If prepared properly they taste like grilled asparagus.

What balances this pizza is the combination of sweet and acidic candied lemons, as well as the salty Prosciutto di Parma. I decided to use this combination on a Pinsa style pizza. Pinsa has been gaining momentum in the U.S. for the last few years. It's typically a combination of grains, such as soy, rice and wheat. The pizza is typically oval, crispy, light and very digestible. Pinsa can have an array of ingredients. Here is a combination that I am sure you have never had.

**1 10-12 ounce high-hydrated dough ball (my blend is 75 percent wheat flour, 10 percent rice flour, 10 percent soy flour and 5 percent spelt with a long fermentation)**

**7 ounces whole milk mozzarella cheese**  
**10 thinly sliced candied Meyer lemons**  
**12 fiddleheads (triple washed, cleaned, and baked thoroughly)**

**6-8 slices Prosciutto di Parma**

**Liquid cane sugar**

**Sea salt**

**Fine black pepper**

**Extra virgin olive oil**

**Shaved Parmigiano**

**Pan spray**

Clean your fiddleheads thoroughly. Place them on a half sheet pan and drizzle with olive oil, salt and pepper. Bake in a 525 F

oven for 8 to 10 minutes until they are well roasted. Set aside.

Place your thinly sliced lemons on a 1/2 sheet pan that is lightly coated. Drizzle with cane sugar and bake in a 425 F oven until slightly translucent. I don't recommend blanching before you bake. Set aside.

Carefully push dough out using your fingertips, dimpling the dough into an oval shape.

Place mozzarella over the dough and place the pizza into a 550 F electric or gas oven. Halfway through, add the fiddleheads and candied lemons. Continue to bake the pizza until it is golden brown and crispy. Cut pizza into desired slices and add the Prosciutto and shaved Parmigiano. Enjoy.

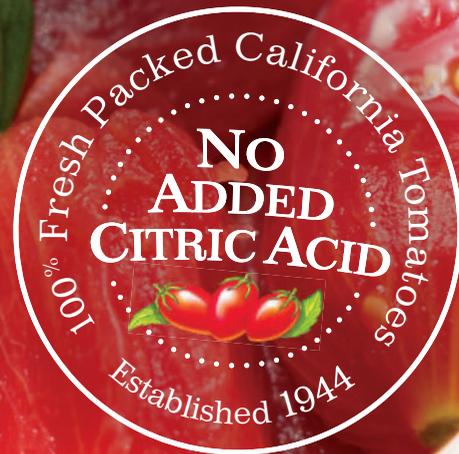


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# Hot Wheels

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Don't blow it with your mobile  
and off-site catering dough

Photo by Josh Keown



**S**ummer is coming quickly, and with Covid restrictions across the country loosening and the number of vaccinations rising, that means dining rooms will be opening and off-site events will be returning. Pizza trailers and catering events will be in full swing, and ensuring your product and dough is consistent and cool will be the ultimate challenge.

Taking on mobile catering and events can be tricky at best. Every time you think you nail down the details in advance, when that day comes there always seems to be a change in plans or an unexpected hurdle. We are always looking for the best ways to control our environment and anything outside your normal will test your knowledge and skill as a pizza maker. Here are a few ideas on how to manage your dough in unanticipated conditions.

**Before you prepare for any event,**

**you will always want to know a few things first.** If you are using an oven given to you by the venue, what kind of oven is it? You will want to know the temperature it can reach as well as if it is a home style, convection oven or if it is a pizza oven. This will dictate what kind of dough you will be making and the style you will be serving. Next, you will want to check the weather and then pray the weather app is accurate or at least darn close. Depending on where you live, there could be four seasonal changes in a day, so having a backup plan is best.

Depending on the weather there are a few things to consider: how much yeast? Bulk fermentation? Starter? When will I ball my dough? If the day looks to be on the cooler side, adding a bit more yeast than normal could help activate your dough a little quicker before the day of the event. Under-

standing that there is such a thing as too much yeast, I would recommend upping by a quarter percent and no more. On the day of the event getting your dough to a warm temperature can be a trickier scenario. I have been in situations where it looked like I messed up my dough because it did not rise or used dead yeast, but it was because the environment was just too cold. It slowed down the yeast activity to a point of hibernation. Warming the dough up as fast as possible was my only solution. If you are ever so lucky to be in a place that has heating, crank up the thermostat. Investing in a warming cabinet that is easily transported is a great way to warm up dough quickly as well as maintain the temperature and humidity. If extra equipment is not in the budget, then something I do quite often is moving the dough in front of the oven and rotating the stack

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occasionally to ensure even heating. Finding the warmest and coolest spot of any kitchen or venue is always good to know.

**In the case that it is too hot, this can be a little trickier.** Refrigerated trucks or vans or inside refrigeration is always the best route, but not all venues and concepts can accommodate this. Large coolers with ice are always needed because not only will your dough need to be kept cold, but your ingredients will also need to be refrigerated. Delivery style bags are also a great tool as they not only keep the heat in but will also keep cold. Investing in a few may be a good idea as these break down when empty and can be easily stacked and stored when they are not in use.

If the weather is anticipated to be hot and you will not have access

to a lot of cold storage, adapting your dough could be an advantage. Bulk fermentation is a great tool that can be used when conditions are not ideal. Although some advance planning may be needed, bulk fermentation is a great technique when there is not a lot of storage on hand. Before the event you would want to make your dough, and instead of scaling out your portions and forming balls the same day, you would place a large portion of your finished dough into large containers and either leave them out in cool areas, so they rise slowly or refrigerate. This bulk dough could be left for a day or so in its container until the day of the event. On the day of the event, you would punch it down and then form the dough into balls. Whether in dough boxes or on sheet pans and a speed rack, the dough would then sit

out at room temperature until ready to use.

Optimally you would want to portion your balls in the morning in anticipation of cooking them later in the afternoon or evening. If it is going to be extremely hot, this rising process will happen sooner in which you would wait to ball your dough till late morning. Bulk fermenting your dough is a great method to learn for those events where conditions are tricky. You have more control over the fermentation process and can decide when to ball your dough depending on weather conditions that day.

Lowering your yeast percentage is another way to ensure your dough will not blow up on you on a hot day. Yeast is more active in a warm environment, and if there is too much yeast in a batch on a hot day, there is a pos-

sibility of the yeast consuming all the sugars in the dough before you use it. This would end up as blown dough and something that will not color well in the oven or rise. Normally bulk fermentation is done without the use of a starter as the end goal is the same, to create flavor and structure. If you choose to go the route of bulk fermentation, omitting the starter is best.

All in all, off-site events can be fun and a great way to expand your company's presence but can also be stressful and overwhelming. Keeping these tips and tricks in mind will help smooth out any bumps and hurdles you may encounter along the way. ■

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**LAURA MEYER** is Administrator & Instructor, The International School of Pizza.

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# LA PIAZZA AL FORNO

Glendale, Arizona



La Piazza is known for being the Phoenix-area spot to try different pizza styles, from Neapolitan and Roman to a New York style offered on weekends. La Piazza has received national attention after multiple appearances on Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives on the Food Network. The pizzeria even rolled out a take-and-bake pizza program. With three pizza styles, the menu

is extensive. The Neapolitan line features the classics and a few additions like Pizza Fritta, a fried calzone stuffed with salami, ricotta, olives, mozzarella and San Marzano tomato sauce. The Roman line features Amatriciana with tomato sauce, bacon, onion, black pepper, pecorino and extra-virgin olive oil.



## ROSALIA

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Rosalia came onto the scene in September 2020 with a compressed menu of wood-fired pizza, appetizers, vegetables and dessert. Rosalia has four sister restaurants, some with an Italian flare, accruing praised reputations in the Twin Cities. The newcomer features Fugazza an Argentinian style pizza, similar to a focaccia (twice baked with more cheese, available by the slice). Its pizza menu is straight-forward with the classic Italian pizzas. It also features the Cavolo Nero with kale, smoked mozzarella, fresco, bacon and hot honey and the Mortadella with fontina, mozzarella and pistachio pesto.

## DRAGON PIZZA

Somerville, Massachusetts

The Boston-area pizzeria is in the midst of renovating its dining room and adding a full bar. While Dragon has received local attention for its slice game, the shop also offers unique specials like its Sunday Chicken and Biscuits. A solid gelato menu features flavors, like Gucci Vanilla Bean, Dark Chocolate, Fresh Mint Chip, Anise, "Old Times" buttermilk with strawberry jam swirl and Reeses Peanut Butter Chink. The pizza menu highlights the Maple Bacon Cheddar with bacon lardons, chili maple syrup, scallions, cheddar and the Kung Pao Chicken pizza with szechuan braised chicken, carrot, peppers, peanuts and kung pao sauce.



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# OPERATIONS

Innovative Loyalty Programs | PAGE 34

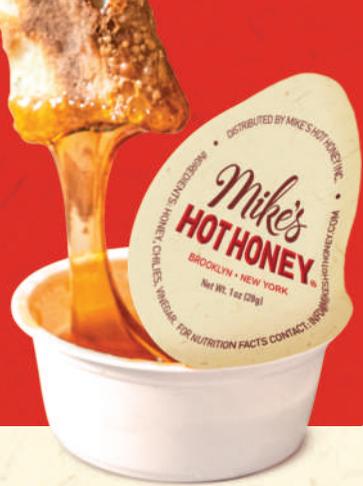
## More Utensils, Less Sharing: The Future of Self-Service

Buffets, salad bars and even fountain beverages are adapting to safer formats

By Nora Caley  
Photos Josh Keown

**R**estaurants with buffets did not disappear during the COVID-19 crisis, but they did adapt. As pizzerias reopen their all-you-can-eat pizza, salad bars and free-refill fountain drinks, the setups look different. Operators say that although there are costs involved in making changes to everything from buffet table setups to utensil holders to whether grated cheese is available in a shaker, the actions are necessary to keep staff and customers safe.





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Cinzetti's Italian Feast, which has locations in Colorado and Kansas, reopened its restaurants with some changes to the service. Plates are available at the table as diners are seated, and at each food station. "Plateware used to be in one spot," says Bobby Fitzgerald, cofounder and partner of Scottsdale, Arizona-based Slatebridge Restaurant Group, which owns Cinzetti's and other restaurants. "Now we have plateware throughout the dining room, so people are not congregating."

The biggest change is in the serving utensils. Each guest takes a clean tong from a basket, helps themselves to a slice of pizza or other item, then drops the tongs in a container to be washed. "We had to invest in 3,000 pieces of each utensil," Fitzgerald says, adding that the amount was quadruple the usual utensil order. "We have a dedicated staff to rotate those out to clean. You really have to stay ahead of it."

Desserts are pre-plated in individual servings, so customers take one of those instead of scooping out the apple crisp, tiramisu or other treat. Cinzetti's made additional changes such as installing Plexiglas barriers between the kitchen and customers. Tables were removed and put in storage, and they might not come back even as capacity limits change. "You have to think not just about CDC guidelines but about comfort," Fitzgerald says. "People are walking and carrying plates. You have so many customers getting up and going to the buffet, you've got to give them space to walk by."

Making sure guests are comfortable is crucial as customers return to dining inside restaurants. That's especially true in buffet concepts, which media reports hinted would not recover post-pandemic. In fact, Fitzgerald says, people are very eager to return to buffets, and reservations at the Northglenn, Colorado location were full for days when it reopened this past March, after being closed for a year. "The first thing you have to remember when people come back is they didn't starve while you were closed," he says. "They are going out for

the experience, so what can you do to make sure they get that experience."

### **Gloves and social distancing**

For some, a fun experience means arcade games. The Amazing Pizza Machine in Omaha, Nebraska has a buffet and a large selection of arcade games. When the establishment had to close for 16 weeks at the start of the pandemic last year, it gave leadership time to evaluate the various changes it would have to make to accommodate social distancing and other protocols. The buffet reopened in July, and to adhere to local mandates had to switch temporarily to cafeteria-style service. "You come down, tell us what you want, and we serve it you," says Allen Wachter, executive vice president. "We had to invest in lots of plexiglass and wall off customers' ability to access their own food."

Eventually the local mandates changed and The Amazing Pizza Machine was able to revert to self-serve, with safety enhancements. The buffet area has stanchions to control the flow of traffic, and there are gloves available for customers. "It's optional, not required," Wachter says. "We see a lot of folks wearing them." The silverware island is gone, and staff hands out those items. Customers can help themselves to fountain beverages, but they must start a new glass each time, instead of refilling their glass.

The buffet and arcade games are popular, especially as families emerge from pandemic isolation. Every other game is turned off to encourage social distancing, and there are hand sanitizer stations throughout the space. In online post-visit surveys, customers indicate that they appreciate the safety measures. "We ask, 'Do you feel like the COVID protocols kept your family safe during your visit?'" Wachter says. "We get 80 percent, or four out of five stars."

### **Other self-serve**

While buffets have been popular for decades, one of the newer self-serve variations is with wine and beer. The

owners of Fringe Pizza in Boulder, Colorado, planned to open Fringe, A Well-Tapped Eatery with a self-pour draft system. The idea was that customers would check in, get a wrist band that they would then scan at the taps to open and meter the beverages. The customer would be charged by the ounce, and could sample several beers and wines. The eatery opened in October last year, during the pandemic, so the self-pour feature was put on hold. "We have not been able to use it as intended," says chef and owner Nate Rajotte. "We have traditional table service, where someone orders beer or wine."

Rajotte says the local health department did not allow the restaurant to offer the self-pour system. When that changes, some customers might still feel uncomfortable helping themselves to wine and beer. "We will have to offer some type of hybrid," he says.

Other items, such as salt, pepper and cheese shakers are not on the tabletops. That's partly out of safety and partly because the food is seasoned in the kitchen. "It was always my intention that we don't have condiments on the table," Rajotte says. "But if someone asks for grated Parmesan or Calabrian chilis we give them some in a ramekin."

Others say they made some changes, big and small. Sam & Louie's Italian Restaurant and New York Pizzeria, with locations in Nebraska, Kansas, Montana, Iowa and Colorado, transitioned to carry-out and delivery at locations in larger cities, but locations in small towns maintained a strong dine-in business. "We removed the shakers and provided packets for Parmesan, pepper flakes, salt and pepper," says Michael Nolan, president. "We are hoping that as vaccines are administered everything will return to the way it was very soon." ■

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**NORA CALEY** is a freelance writer who covers small business, finance and lifestyle topics.



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# Packaging Options

The ins and outs of today's to-go containers

By Nora Caley

**P**izzeria owners already know how to package pizza, but it's a challenge to wrap up salads, appetizers and pasta to go. As operators increased their carryout and delivery options during the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to find new boxes for these other foods. The containers have to be well made and inexpensive, and meet other requirements such as environmental sustainability.

Most of the takeout and delivery orders at Joy Hill Pizza in Denver are for pizza, but lately customers have been ordering appetizers such as the Walnut Ricotta and Hummus Plate and the Charcuterie Plate with meats and pickled vegetables. "It did take us a while to figure it out," says Julia Duncan-Roitman, partner and managing member. "We wanted to streamline packaging so we didn't have to order a ton of products, and we felt guilty about the waste we are creating."

Duncan-Roitman says it would have been easy to use the cheapest option, Styrofoam clamshells, but she wanted to use recyclable and compostable containers. After much trial and error with many samples from vendors, Joy Hill Pizza opted for a nine-inch by nine-inch

by three-inch compostable clamshell. The container works well for appetizers, such as the popular pepperoni rolls, as well as for salads and other items. For sauces and dips, the eatery uses small soup bowls, and sides such as salad dressing or burrata go in two-ounce containers. "We try to multipurpose everything as much as possible," she says. "We are very crunched for space." To defray the added costs, Joy Hill Pizza raised prices gradually and slightly.

## Stay green

Environmental issues are top of mind at Sunny Hill in Seattle, where the takeout containers are made of expelled sugar cane. "It has to be highly compostable and recyclable," says owner Jason Stoneburner. "Seattle is a very green area."

In addition to environmental concerns, there were other considerations. Sunny Hill offers pizza as well as burgers, meatballs, waffle fries, salads and other items. The boxes had to be tall enough not to smash the top of the burger buns. To prevent the waffle fries from getting soggy in a closed box, they are packaged in bags. "We looked at how the packaging interacted with the food," says Stoneburner, who also owns the restaurants



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Stoneburner and Bastille. “We are concerned about the guest experience, and about the unboxing of the food.”

The boxes had to be spill proof and sturdy, as customers often eat in their cars or at the park across the street from Sunny Hill. Also, the boxes had to reflect the premium branding of the restaurant. “We were worried about flimsy packs that don’t travel well,” Stoneburner says. “We have to think about keeping on par with what’s important to us. We use organic local ingredients and we wanted to carry that through our to-go packaging.”

To make up for the added cost of the eco-conscious packaging, Sunny Hill charges one dollar for orders placed on the Tock platform. “When you use the online ordering system, it shows up as a line item and you are aware,” Stoneburner says. “It’s a dollar. We’ve gotten almost zero pushback.”

Compostable is not the only eco-friendly option. During the pandemic, Brasserie Brixton in Denver became (Le) Brix Pizza and Wine. The owners built a Neapolitan wood-fired pizza oven and began offering pizza, salads and appetizers for takeout and delivery. Menu items such as Roasted Carrots or Beet and Burrata are packaged in plastic containers.

“I find a lot of people, when containers are compostable, they use them only once so it’s environmentally unfriendly,” says chef and partner Nicholas Dalton. “I wanted to get something people could take home, wash in the dishwasher, and use again to take to work.” Dalton says the plastic containers cost more than traditional clamshell containers, but less than compostable.

### Presenting family meals

Some restaurants launched to-go family meals during the pandemic. Los Angeles-based Fresh Brothers, with 19 locations in California, launched a Wings Tailgate Bundle and a Lasagna Family Meal last year. “As people were eating more at home, they were looking for more creative ways to feed their

families,” says chief executive officer Geoff Goodman. “We never had a family size offering other than a large pizza. We didn’t have another core entrée that we could offer to guests.”

The \$39.99 Lasagna Family Meal features a fully cooked lasagna in a baking tin, plus an order of garlic knots, inside a large catering box. The \$49.99 Wings Tailgate Bundle comes in a large box that features 50 wings on one side and six sauces on the other side. “It’s a nice case,” Goodman says. “You flip up the lid and it’s a beautiful presentation.”

Also last year, Fresh Brothers upgraded its salads, and started packing them in fully compostable containers with clear lids. The clear lids help consumers see the quality of the salad, and the compostable feature reflects the chain’s commitment to the environment. The investment paid off, as Goodman says salad sales are up considerably. “We always focus on getting better versus simply getting cheaper,” he says. “We are very in tune to what our guests expect from us. Even when things are difficult, those are times you work smarter and not just find pennies.”

Safety is also a factor in takeout and delivery packaging. Fired Pie in Scottsdale, Arizona packages its salads in clear clamshell salad containers. The pizzeria also offers Mac & Cheese, which comes in the foil container that it is baked in. “The only thing we did add was the safety stickers on all third-party takeout,” says Fred Morgan, co-owner of the 21-location Fired Pie. The stickers display the restaurant logo and are meant as a tamper resistant device. “There were some reports on the news of third-party drivers eating food from bags or boxes, [and they] even showed a driver drinking a shake then delivering.” ■

**NORA CALEY** is a freelance writer who covers small business, finance and lifestyle topics.

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OPERATIONS

By Rachel Hartman

# The Fan Club

Innovative loyalty programs that keep customers coming back

The concept of loyalty programs dates to the 18th century. In recent times, however, there has been an increased interest among restaurants to offer this type of customer-attracting-and-retaining method. Today, a plethora of big brands ranging from Chick-fil-A to Papa John's tout rewards programs.

The trend can make it tough to find a niche. It's no surprise, then, that places are looking for new twists on

an old technique. Panera Breads offers customers a subscription to unlimited coffee for just \$8.99 a month. Throw technology solutions into the mix, and operators are faced with a mountain of choices.

Despite the influx of loyalty programs, creating and maintaining one still holds the potential for long-term benefits. "Developing and curating an in-depth loyalty program allows a restaurateur to understand their guest

segmentation and the entire journey a guest takes when interacting with their brand, both in the four walls and outside," says Stephen Lee, director of strategic partnerships for PAR Technology, a restaurant technology company based in New Hartford, New York. It also helps establish a one-to-one relationship with guests. Creating potentially lifelong customers that send in regular orders is perhaps the ultimate perk.

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**TEXASPETE**

The key to making these programs work lies in understanding what consumers are looking for, and then setting up a uniquely designed program that's in tune with your specialty and brand.

### Recognizing the playing field.

"Today, customer loyalty solutions are about so much more than making sure guests can earn and redeem rewards

for their dining experience," Lee says. At the same time, diners are expecting more than just points or coupons when they order food. "Today's guests are savvy and looking for more personal experiences," Lee says. "Offering a discount on a pepperoni pizza to all of your guests, regardless of their dietary preferences, is a thing of the past." This sort of 'spray and pray' model is more

likely to turn guests away, rather than bring them back for more.

Getting more personal. Red's Savoy Pizza, a growing pizza chain in Minnesota with 16 locations, offers guests the chance to sign up for its Thank You Rewards program. Diners receive Thank You Points for each dollar spent on qualifying food and drink. After collecting 75 Thank You Points, they receive a \$5.00 Thank You Bucks reward. This amount is credited to the customer's Thank You Card and can be redeemed for more pizza or other qualifying menu items.

Members of the loyalty program also can receive a 10-inch, one topping pizza on their birthday. "It helps to recognize the person," says Reed Daniels, CEO of Red's Savoy. Some customers may come in solo for their birthday pizza, while others will bring family members and others who will pay for their meals. The arrangement creates a perceived value for diners, and also creates a balance from a financial standpoint for the restaurant.

### Building in more aspects of personalization has been central to the loyalty program.

"We want to care about that other person, and part of caring is knowing what they like and don't like," Daniels says. This is the approach taken as data is gathered from customers. For instance, when considering offering a promotion related to chicken wings through the loyalty program, the option isn't necessarily pushed on every customer. "If we know someone is a vegetarian, let's not offer them chicken wings," Daniels says.

Using technology to build programs. "In 2021, a lot has to be omni channel," Daniels says. This includes loyalty programs, which can easily get overlooked if they are only showcased on your website or a single sign within the place. "Guests can see our loyalty program when

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they walk into a store, order online and use our app," Daniels says. Other places where sign-up information can be included: on pizza boxes and at the bottom of receipts. "It has to be top of mind," Daniels says.

Providing specific details about what to expect will be appreciated by today's diners. "Most programs are free to join, but clearly stating the benefits can persuade an ambivalent potential member," says Darren Easton, vice president and creative director at The Cyphers Agency, who has helped develop and promote loyalty programs for pizza restaurants. Feature the perks and provide a way for customers to reach out and ask questions, such as a telephone number or chat box.

Continue with the clarity theme for the registration process. When it comes to signing up for the loyalty program, "The simpler, the better," Easton says. Staff members can ask diners if they'd

like to sign up and help gather their information. For online registration, make a clear call to action, such as "Click here to sign up." Once the customer clicks, the sign-up page should be streamlined and request only basic information, like e-mail address and phone number. "Explain the straightforward nature of the sign-up process in your social media posts to reassure your audience that it's a quick and easy click through," Easton says.

**In addition to making the loyalty program easy to find and sign up for, it's equally as important to have a system to track the client's journey.** "Every time someone calls in, we can see if the guest is in the reward program," Daniels says. "If they are not, they can be asked if they want to be in it."

Find new ways to delight. "Your customers want to feel like they're part of

something special—something exclusive," Easton says. "Although you want to clearly state the perks of the loyalty program in the social media content, it's important to leave a bit of mystery that ignites some curiosity." You might offer a surprise bonus that will be revealed after the customer signs up, such as a free order of mozzarella sticks or complimentary dessert with a meal. You can send out monthly benefits that are valid only for loyalty program members.

As you build and maintain your loyalty program, keep the diner front and center. As Easton says, "Loyal customers are the lifeblood of successful restaurants, and those customers should be rewarded." ■

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**RACHEL HARTMAN** is a freelance writer who covers small business, finance and lifestyle topics.

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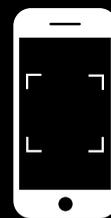




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# KITCHEN

Pineapple is here to stay - Page 44

## A Quick Oil Change

A Guide to Cooking Oils in the Pizzeria

By John Gutekanst  
Photo Josh Keown

For centuries oil has been an integral part of cooking because of its inherent ability to change the nature of food. The saturated fats of yesteryear like butter and lard added to the popularity of fried foods, baked goods and charred meats but were unfortunately not the healthiest oils to consume. Back then, not much thought was given to when, where and how unrefined oils such as fresh-pressed vegetable oils were made and stored. This led to off-tasting, expired and even rancid oils populating the market.

Today, if you do not keep an eye on your oil products and information about provenance, production and shelf-time, you may be feeding bad oil to your customers. Our pizzerias operate with many different doughs, techniques and cooking temperatures. Finding the right oil can be a choice of quality over mediocrity, flavor over cost and what oils are perfect for your operation.

### The Flavor of Oil

Some oils transform the flavor of foods enveloping the foods in the pressed oil flavor increasing the harmony of each dish, salad or baked item. The flavored oils by their very nature have lower smoke points because of the extra compounds in the



oils. Here are some great tasting flavored oils for you and your pizzeria and their smoke points.

**Extra Virgin Olive Oil:** Smoke point 325F-375F. The king of oils has many different types like unfiltered, filtered and mixed. I use only accredited fresh California extra-virgin shipped in oxygen-free containers. Garlic-rosemary flavored oil is very easy to make for pizza or slow roasted garlic with this oil. (See recipe.) I also use extra virgin instead of butter to make laminated dough or to cover flavorful fougasse before and after the oven for a flavor explosion.

**Walnut Oil:** Smoke point, 320F. This surprisingly sweet and nutty, (duh.) flavor makes the most wonderful vinaigrette when combined with balsamic vinegar. It is perfect on aged cheeses and especially paired with asparagus, cold noodles, peaches, pears and radicchio.

**Sesame Oil:** Smoke point 350-410F. Roasted sesame oil is better with salads and finishing oils and light sesame oil is better for sautéing and baking. Great with Dijon, orange, garlic, ginger, chicken and vinegar.

**Coconut Oil:** Smoke point 400F. This oil is best in non-hydrogenated or virgin form and is great for frying. Its taste has notes of nuts, vanilla and is great with almonds. This oil starts turning to liquid at 72F which makes for flaky baked items and is great with garlic, ginger, scallions, lime, greens and chocolate.

### Neutral Oils

These oils are suitable for high heat frying or for adding to flavored oils to bring the benefit of their high-heat smoke points to the flavor, (Example: Extra virgin/canola oils). You may also want an oil that has zero flavor to not muddle with a dish or sear vegetables or meats. Here are some neutral flavored oils you may want to try along with their smoke points:

• **Peanut Oil:** Smoke point, 450F. This has a mild flavor and great for Asian dishes and searing and roasting, deep-frying and grilling. Using this in

your restaurant may produce problems with customers with severe allergies. Great with soy, ginger, garlic, curries, chicken and pork.

• **Canola Oil:** Smoke point, 400F. Canola can be used for medium to high temperatures which makes it great for baking but not good for deep frying. Many chefs like its neutral flavor favors salad dressings. Good with chilies, sauces and soups and used in combination with flavorful olive oils.

• **Rice Bran Oil:** Smoke point, 490. This high-heat oil is great for searing. Its light viscosity makes for less oil being absorbed during cooking. Until recently, rice bran chaff was used for animal feed. Now, the oils uses are best for frying chicken, searing vegetables like potato, broccoli, shrimp and thick vegetable greens, like broccoli.

## EXTRA VIRGIN AND GARLIC SACHEL BOMBE

This little ditty has become one of my customers favorite bread item. The slow roasted garlic in extra-virgin oil is steamed in a small bag of crispy dough. The ricotta gem inside adds to the supple garlic heaven and is countered with a cool and chunky garlic-tomato vinaigrette. I sometimes use chive strings or long leeks to tie. Please note: If your oven cooks with very strong top heat, you may want to bake these at 450 at 15 minutes.

**2 cups whole peeled garlic cloves (approx. 10 ounces)**  
**¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**  
**5 sprigs of fresh thyme tied in a small bundle**  
**3, 4-ounce proprietary pizza dough balls**  
**3 tablespoon whole milk ricotta cheese**  
**3 lengths of 12 inches of culinary twine**  
**6-7 large, premium canned pear tomatoes, (approx. 12 ounces) (like Valoroso or San Marzano)**  
**1 teaspoon red wine vinegar**  
**5 ciliegine fresh mozzarella balls, (small balls) cut in half**  
**3 leaves fresh basil**  
**Salt and pepper to taste**

Place the whole garlic cloves, the bundle of thyme and the ¼ cup extra-virgin oil in a small pan and place into a 300-degree oven for 3.5 hours. The garlic will turn dark-golden and shrink a little. When done, place aside to cool.

While cooling, use your fingers to drain the tomatoes of their juice and pull in half then into rough strips. Place into a bowl with a pinch of salt and pepper and the teaspoon of red wine vinegar. Pour ¼ cup of the garlic pan oil into the tomato mix and gently stir. Set aside to marinate.

Pre-heat a deck oven to 500 F. Form 3 discs approximately 4 inches in diameter of your proprietary pizza dough and place all on a parchment covered tray.

Take the kitchen twine and double each string.

Using a straining spoon, place 30 of the slow-baked garlic cloves into the middle of each round with a pinch of salt. Place a 1 tablespoon dollop of ricotta on top of the garlic. You may have some residual oil sneaking to the edge of the dough, and you must stop it from hindering the seal by pulling up in different places. Do not pull the dough off the tray or you will stretch it too much and ruin the shape.

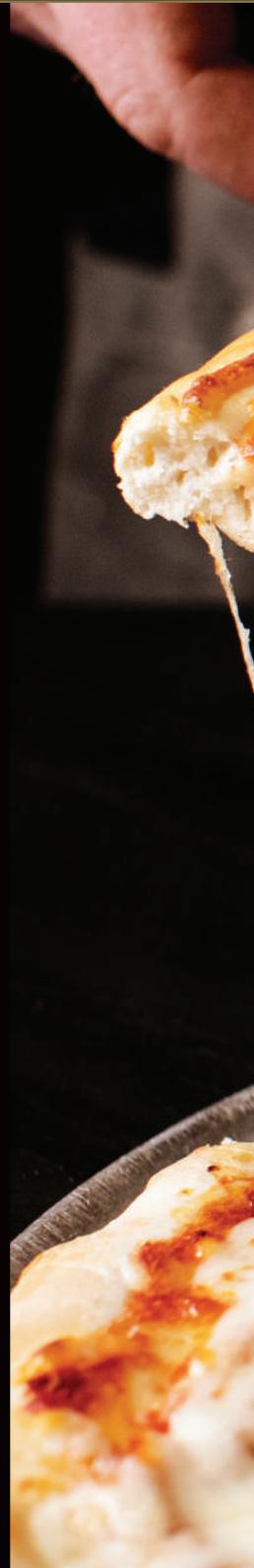
Fold the dough in half. Start at one end and fold the dough in an "S" shape all the way up the folded half-moon. You may have to use your pinkie fingers to hold the other end up if oil leaches out. Bundle all the folded dough at the top of the sack leaving 1 inch of above your now tightening fingers. Squeeze the neck of the dough and tie with the twine.

Place the tray containing the satchels in the oven and bake for 12 minutes. Note: These satchels are tall. You may turn the top of your oven down in temperature if the top starts burning. It is important to bake the outside without having any raw dough in the center.

Place the garlic-tomato vinaigrette on a plate and top with the mozzarella ball halves. Place the garlic sachel bombe in the center of the plate, remove the twine and sprinkle with the basil. Enjoy. ■

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**JOHN GUTKANST** owns Avalanche Pizza in Athens, Ohio.



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# SWEET SURRENDER

## KITCHEN

Give in to  
pineapple, already

By Jeremy White  
Photos Josh Keown

**M**y love affair with pineapple began at a young age. In an effort to provide me with healthy snacks, my mother would cut up fresh pineapple, along with a variety of other fruits, and keep a large fruit salad in the fridge. When I tried to grab sugary cereals, candy and other junk foods, she'd do her best to get me to satisfy my sweet tooth with the fruit.

It mostly worked. I quickly discovered that I truly love nearly all fruits, but in particular I was bananas about bananas, peaches and — you guessed it — pineapple.

It wasn't long before I started requesting ham and pineapple as my pizza toppings, much to the chagrin of my friends, who favored sausage, green peppers and mushrooms.

Now I know there's a certain segment of pizza society that, to this very day, consider pineapple on pizza to be blasphemous. To those people I resolutely say this: it's okay to be wrong. Nobody's perfect.

In all seriousness, for those who want to hang their hat on tradition ... I get it. I really do. I'm a "baseball purist," and that label comes with an extreme disdain for the Designated Hitter. Most modern-day hardball fans disagree with that — they want to see more home runs.

Well, modern diners want bursts of fresh flavors and combinations that go well beyond the traditional. Hey, Buffalo chicken pizza is not traditional, but it's insanely popular. Give the people what they want, within reason, or they'll get it somewhere else. If you still think pineapple isn't within reason in 2021, we've already established that you're just plain wrong!

My personal favorite pizza that features pineapple carries a sweet heat to it. Check it out.

## **SPICY PINEAPPLE PIE**

**14-ounce dough ball**  
**6 ounces tomato sauce**  
**¼ cup jalapeño peppers, chopped (I use habanero when I want a hotter profile)**  
**4 ounces bacon, chopped**  
**6 ounces spicy soppressata**  
**4 ounces pineapple, chopped**  
**6 ounces mozzarella, shredded**  
**4 ounces fresh mozzarella, torn**  
**6 medium leaves fresh basil, torn**

Stretch your dough and apply sauce. Top evenly with jalapeños, bacon, soppressata and pineapple. Add the cheeses and bake. When pizza is finished, remove from oven, top with basil and serve.

## **HAWAIIAN SUNSHINE**

**14-ounce dough ball**  
**6 ounces tomato sauce**  
**¼ cup pine nuts**  
**4 ounces prosciutto**  
**4 ounces salami**  
**4 ounces pineapple, chopped**  
**10 ounces mozzarella, shredded**

Stretch your dough and apply sauce. Top evenly with pine nuts, prosciutto, salami and pineapple.

Add the cheese and bake. Serve with pleasure because you realize pineapple on pizza is awesome.

I realize some of this is just too much for some of you fundamental traditionalists to handle. So here's a pie that is very traditional ... but has pineapple.

## **OKAY, BOOMER**

**14-ounce dough ball**  
**6 ounces tomato sauce**  
**6 ounces sausage**  
**2 ounces green olives**  
**2 ounces red onion, chopped**  
**4 ounces mushrooms, sliced**  
**4 ounces pineapple, chopped**  
**12 ounces mozzarella, shredded**

Stretch your dough and apply sauce. Top evenly with sausage, green olives, red onion, mushrooms and pineapple. Add the cheese and bake. When pizza is finished, remove from oven and serve with grated Parmesan and crush red pepper on the side.



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**PICK A FIGHT** Love pineapple on pizza? Hate it? Have a pizza recipe featuring pineapple that you simply adore and that flies off the shelves? Tell me about it: [jwhite@pizzatoday.com](mailto:jwhite@pizzatoday.com).

# IRRESISTIBLE

By  
Denise Greer  
Photo  
Josh Keorn



# INDULGENCE

• Add gelato  
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menu mix

**T**here is something irresistible about gelato. Maybe it's the smooth, soft and creamy flavor or that it doesn't leave your palate coated in the heavy butterfat of its dessert sibling, ice cream.

The demand for the popular Italian treat is growing in America. New and innovative flavors have sparked a rise in North America's preference for gelato, according to the ResearchAndMarkets.com's North American Frozen Desserts Market Insights 2020-2025. And the demand continues to skyrocket.

Gelato proves to be a fitting complement to pizza. Both are meticulously crafted with culinary creativity.

### What's hot in gelato

Regardless of whether you source or make gelato in-house, let's get down to the nitty gritty of what flavors are hot this year. We asked four operators with successful gelato programs to give us the skinny on popular gelato flavors.

Sam Hathorn, co-owner of Sam & Greg's Pizza in Huntsville, Alabama, says, most popular flavors are simply chocolate and vanilla. That doesn't keep Sam & Greg's from introducing innovative flavors that sell well. "We have made some great flavors over the years — honey goat cheese, spicy hot chocolate (with cayenne), and strawberry balsamic (with vinegar)," she says. "In 2021 we have created pineapple upside down cake, peanut butter Oreo, and buttermilk pancake. My team also makes a vegan gelato from pea protein milk that is creamier than most vegan gelati."

Pistachio and Oreo are favorites at Papatella's in Alexandria, Virginia.

Sarah Bruggeman, pastry chef at Pangea Kitchen in Evansville, Indiana, says, "We have found that Stracciatella, Pistachio, Salted Caramel, Mint Oreo, Biscotti Crunch and Peanut Butter Cup are Evansville's favorites." She warns not to shortcut the classics. "The classic Stracciatella can be described as 'chocolate chip' but we are not just adding chocolate chips to this base," she says. "Stracciatella means 'little shred' in Italian. So, we actually drizzle melted chocolate into the gelato, let it sit for a second to freeze the chocolate, and then turn the machine back on. The chocolate strings then break up into little irregular bits that are mixed

throughout the entire gelato."

Pistachio is another flavor where operators may look for cost savings. "Pistachio is definitely the priciest gelato that we make," Bruggeman says. "We use 100 percent pistachios. Other places may use a combination of pistachios and almonds to help offset the cost. But you can taste the difference."

Mike Bausch, owner of Andolini's Pizzeria and STG Gelateria in Tulsa, Oklahoma, says, "The most popular flavors are what you'd expect — Fior Di Latte, Pistachio, Strawberry, Raspberry and Chocolate. We have 65 flavors and counting ... some of our non-traditional flavors that sell well are Salted Caramel, Chocolate Cake and Lemon Biscotti. Lately, we've had a lot of interest in our Extra Virgin Olive Oil gelato. Since we're making all of our bases from scratch (White Base, Yellow (Egg) Base, Chocolate Base and Sorbetto Base) we can experiment a lot. We've used ricotta, mascarpone, yogurt, broken cannoli shells, etc... We're even experimenting with an "Everything Bagel" gelato right now.

### Making gelato from scratch

Making gelato is similar to scratch-made ice cream, Bruggeman says. "We mix whole milk, heavy cream, sugars, dry milk powder, and a stabilizer," she says. "We cook that base low and slow. Let it cool overnight. Next morning, we add whatever flavor we are feeling. Mix very well. Then we turn the gelato low and slow in our gelato machine imported from Italy."

Bausch makes gelato the old-fashioned way at STG. "We make our STG Gelato the very old-fashioned way — hot process," he says, "meaning we blend milk, sugar and sometimes egg yolks and cook it in a pasteurizer. Much of the gelato made in America today is a mix that simply has either water or milk added to it and then is spun in a batch freezer. We chose to do it the 'hot process' way because we didn't want to ever hear 'that's not what it tastes like in Italy' from any of our customers and thankfully we quite often hear 'That tastes better than in Italy.'

"Using very high-quality local milk, local fruits and importing Italian flavorings, our food cost hovers in the 23-25-percent range depending on flavor," he continues.

Hathorn too recommends making the base from scratch even though it's more work. "It really makes a difference in the

flavor of the gelato," she says. "(Co-owner) Greg says, 'the base is where it's at.'"

### Gelato making logistics

Just like the pizza line, gelato requires equipment and training. Papatella's co-owner Anastasiya Algame heads up its gelato program. "It is an investment," she says. "All the equipment is Italian-made and quite pricey. The training is quite extensive, and we have designated staff members that specialize in it. It is not an exact science, so it's important that the gelato maker develops the 'feel' for it."

Gelato equipment requires both a large financial investment, as well as valuable kitchen space. "One of the biggest hurdles to starting a Gelateria is the price of equipment," Bausch says. "Pasteurizers (roughly \$20-\$30K), Batch Freezers (roughly \$15-\$25K), Blast Freezers (roughly \$10-\$15K) and Display cases (\$15-\$20K) are expensive — but — they hold their value very well and generally have more than half their initial value 10 years later. There is also very good quality used equipment available.

"For anyone considering making gelato in their existing business. I'd probably start with the cold process since it has the least barriers to entry and the training / equipment is minimal," Bausch continues. "If someone wishes to do a truly legit Gelato (like the type you'd eat in an Italian neighborhood that has no tourists) then the only way to go is 'hot process.'"

Hathorn was able to find value. "We got our equipment secondhand when we started out," she says. "It is much cheaper to take a gently used gelato freezer off someone's hands than to buy new."

Bausch, Hathorn and Bruggeman also went through in-depth training.

"We were trained in Italy, use Italian equipment, Italian ingredients and Italian processes," Bausch says. "We certify all of our Gelateria's before they can make any of our gelato."

Hathorn found attending a school on frozen desserts helped kick off the program at Sam & Greg's. "It also taught us the science of gelato," she says. "I think if you're making it from scratch, it's helpful to have that training."

# RISING STARS OF THE PIZZA INDUSTRY

*Seven Breakout Pizzeria Owners to keep an eye on in 2021*

# Que Wimberly

## The Missing Brick – Indianapolis, Indiana

### How did you begin working in the pizza industry?

I began my career in the pizza industry by wanting to introduce my two sons to entrepreneurship. We as a family have always loved pizza and believed that our city (Indy) was missing a black-owned pizza joint that serves uniquely crafted pizzas and celebrates our culture. My journey in this started two years ago with no formal training or experience. Just trade shows and trial and error. Not only are we self-built, we're also self-taught.

### What is something uniquely you that you have brought to the pizza industry?

Indy Style Pizza is the one thing that we brought to the pizza industry. We created a pizza style that's just as unique as Detroit, Chicago, New York and California style pizzas. Starting with our crust that's shaped like the state of Indiana. Most of our ingredients that top our rectangular shaped pizzas are produced and manufactured right here in Indiana. Indy Style Pizza has become a household name here. Soon the world will taste what Indy has to offer.

### What's been your biggest challenge in the pizza business?

My biggest challenge in the pizza business is probably what just about every pizzeria is experiencing at the moment and that's hiring good employees. I'm hoping to see a turnaround soon, especially with college students coming home for the summer.

### What do you do to motivate your staff during these challenging times?

Food makes everyone happy. Normally when my team needs motivation I FEED THEM!!

### What area do you feel like you currently need to improve upon to continue taking your pizza business to the next level?

I would say in order for TMB to get to the next level of business, it's time for me to delegate and hire highly skilled professionals in the area of expertise that we need, like a PR/ Branding coach and marketing manager. I guess that means developing an expense budget for employees outside the restaurant and day-to-day operations.



# Joey Karvelas

**Karvelas Pizza Co. – Newnan,  
Lagrange, Hogansville, Georgia**

**How did you begin working in the pizza industry?**

The pizza industry found me before I could choose for myself! My parents owned a pizza restaurant where I started working the dish pit as soon as I got off the school bus. I have found that pizza has always found a way to be a part of major moments in my life; after my father sold the family pizza place, I worked in an Atlanta pizzeria where I came up to the pizza line. I then found myself in downtown Knoxville, Tennessee, working for my now good friend Gavin Loyer at his small place on Gay St. While I was managing this restaurant, I met my wife who was a server. A few years after I moved back to Georgia, our old family pizza place came up for sale and I leaped at the opportunity; and in 2014 Karvelas Pizza Co. was born.

**What is something uniquely you that you have brought to the pizza industry?**

I like to think everything I do is original, haha. But I know that our restaurants are a direct result of years of eating out and actively seeking the hidden gems on any vacation I took. I would tell my wife, "I like their playlist or I love how they displayed their sauces or that window over there looks awesome."

So we took things we loved from all these different places we ate and put them together to create Karvelas Pizza Company. One thing though that we do that is unlike any other restaurant out there, is using the word "no". Something I have been told my entire life is that the customer is always right and they should have it their way. But what I have come to learn is that it is alright to say "no". I have created and developed these recipes and pizza combinations through years of trying and testing. I know they are perfect the way they are, and that is how I want other people to experience our pizza. So on our menu it is clearly stated that there is no adding, substituting or leaving off anything on our specialty

pizzas. That is something uniquely Karvelas but I think it is something more people in the restaurant business, especially the pizza business, should feel comfortable saying. Not only because I know that our product is good the way it comes, but saying "no" has revolutionized the way our kitchen operates. On a busy Friday night our pizza line does not have to read a ticket and think what to leave off, what to add on, or half this and half that. They can simply see a works pizza, and know exactly how to top it, which in turn will get our customer their food quicker and cut down on the ticket time overall. Knowing our pizza as it comes cuts down on the amount of mistakes made and allows us to feed more people faster.

**What's been your biggest challenge in the pizza business?**

It is hard to say there has been one big challenge in the pizza business. I think the biggest challenge is the little challenges and everyday challenges that come up constantly. The pizza business is not static, it is dynamic. Our business is always changing and always growing and there are always new challenges associated with our growth. Knowing what to do is hard; there is no playbook given to pizzeria owners about how to be successful. Making choices and trusting that you're doing the right thing is a big challenge for an owner.

**What do you do to motivate your staff during these challenging times?**

Our staff's motivation is just as high now as it has been anytime. How we treat our people has not changed from 2019 to 2020. We want anyone who chooses to work at Karvelas to enjoy themselves and always have fun at what they're doing. The bright and funky artwork we have on our walls, the playlist that is full blast all day, and our consistent social media filming all help our staff to look forward to coming into work. That in turn makes for motivated people. We are a mom-and-pop place, but not the traditional version. Now we have to make sure our restaurants stay a place people want to work. Also, you can never underestimate the value of a southern smile!



# Marcus Medina



**Hella Pie Pizza Company — Tracy, California**

## **How did you begin working in the pizza industry?**

It was around my 30th birthday when I felt that I wasn't happy with doing construction my whole life. I decided that I wanted to start a mobile wood-fired pizzeria after cooking in my backyard for friends and family. We were mobile for about 2.5 years. We did farmer's markets, breweries, weddings and pretty much any type of party you'd want to get catered. Then the pandemic hit and all the parties stopped. An opportunity came to take over an existing bakery in our hometown and we jumped on it.

## **What's been your biggest challenge in the pizza business?**

My biggest challenge has been how to

make sure that we're achieving our most consistent product. Every day I feel like we are going to war with constant changes and obstacles. How we navigate ourselves as a unit to overcome them is truly the challenge. Overcoming those obstacles as a team is also one of the most rewarding things though — family, friends and staff. It takes us all so I'm very thankful for our support system. We couldn't do this alone.

## **What is something uniquely you that you have brought to the pizza industry?**

When I was a kid growing up in the 90s pizza was so cool and fun. Branding was on point. I've kind of brought that type of nostalgia back for both adults and children. We were all kids at some point and so making pizza is fun, but also simple and beautiful at the same time. That is what I think makes my business

unique. Also our business name. We wanted to be something that resonated with locals. We felt like nothing says Northern California like Hella. You can pin the region where we are from just by that word. We are just locals cooking for locals and that authenticity brings us more support than you can imagine.

## **What do you do to motivate your staff during these challenging times?**

I'm still not quite sure how to motivate people. I'm not sure if we can. I definitely have surrounded myself with a staff that motivates me to be better. Constantly trying to make our staff's jobs easier, more efficient and comfortable. Also, being conscious of their time and time off. Hopefully that shows my team that I care and I'm thinking about them. If they see that, then I think they will buy into the work.

## **What is something you've learned at Pizza Expo that has helped guide your business?**

I feel blessed to have started this career in my 30s. Starting a new career you have to swallow your pride or ego. Not that we should have one anyway. For a while I felt alone. I hadn't grown up in the industry so I was very unsure about everything. I booked my first Pizza Expo in 2019. After that trip I didn't feel so alone anymore. I felt like I was embraced with love and support. I started building on those relationships made in Las Vegas and eventually found that my pizza naturally got better from all of the knowledge shared through the conversations with mentors that I look up to.

## **What area do you feel like you currently need to improve upon to continue taking your pizza business to the next level?**

Being a self-taught pizza maker/entrepreneur, I guess you could say that I'm Hella insecure. It's a blessing and a curse. Everything that I do probably takes me a little longer because I want to figure it out. I definitely try and keep things simple but I feel like I need to get out of my comfort zone and get around people with more knowledge. I try to fill my time with podcasts, audio books or videos. I'm looking forward to taking some hands-on classes though so that I can start taking my chef skills to a higher level.

RISING  
STARS



# Audrey Kelly

## **Audrey Jane's Pizza Garage – Boulder, Colorado**

### **How did you begin working the pizza industry?**

My first job in the pizza industry was working at Tony's Pizza Napoletana in North Beach, SF. I had just returned from Italy and was obsessed with learning how to make pizza. Tony (Gemignani) had just opened his restaurant and pizza school. I took one of his classes and somehow talked my way into working for him after the class ended. He became my greatest mentor and friend and has given me my foundation for pizza making.

### **What's been your biggest challenge in the pizza business?**

My biggest challenge has been to balance my own expectations. I am inherently a perfectionist and in the beginning of opening my own shop I wanted to do everything myself so that it would be done correctly. I was there from open to close the first three years and made almost every pizza. I have learned, and am still learning, that in order to succeed you have to not only be a great pizza maker and have a great product but even more importantly, be a great teacher and leader. At some point you have to let go and trust other people with your product. To do that, I really had to learn how to teach and manage my team. It is a skill I am constantly trying to improve on and one I think the best owners possess.

### **What is something uniquely you that you have brought to the pizza industry?**

I believe that my business and

pizza itself are unique. I took that fundamentals of the classic pizza making techniques and turned them into my own product. Since leaving Tony's I have become more engrossed with sourdough starters and bread making and realized just how important that is to pizza making. We now do a 100 percent naturally leavened dough using some freshly milled flour. While we definitely are not the only ones doing this, ours will never be the same as anyone else's. A lot of owners create a recipe and business model and continue to do the same thing for years, I am constantly trying to improve upon not only my product but business itself. Someone can try to replicate my pizza and store but they will never be able to capture the energy and personality of it. To me, that is the true beauty of small mom and pop shops, they all bring something different to the game, something that no one else can do or create.

### **What do you do to motivate your staff during these challenging times?**

I think that the biggest motivator is to lead by example. While I have learned to delegate some tasks, I will never be the type of owner/operator that expects my team to do things I won't. I am in there every day working just as hard, if not harder than everyone else.

### **What is something you've learned at Pizza Expo that has helped guide your business?**

Every year I walk away from Expo with a wealth of new inspiration and knowledge. I learn from the demos, panels and keynote speakers, but also just from talking

with everyone else in the industry. Some years I go into Expo feeling a little burned out but consistently leave feeling invigorated and ready to take on the year. To me, more than anything else it is the connections and support that Expo offers that makes it invaluable. I truly believe that the pizza industry is unique in how open and willing everyone is to each other that makes it feel like a second family. The biggest thing that I have taken away from Expo is that it is okay to ask for help because everyone needs it at some point. Everyone has a different skill set and you can't expect yourself to be good at every aspect of the business.

### **What area do you feel like you currently need to improve upon to continue taking your pizza business to the next level?**

For me, the best way to take my business to the next level is to step back a little so that I can look at the bigger picture and expand upon it. I am usually so focused on the day to day and minute to minute action that I never have the time or energy to improve or fix the larger things. It is something that I am truly trying to focus on and hope to make a few changes in the next year. As my uncle says, "Being on the counter can be counter productive." Basically, I always want to be at my shop making pizzas and interacting with customers, but I need to learn when to step back and trust my team so I can focus on smoothing out the edges and expanding as well.

# Leah Scurto



**PizzaLeah**  
– Windsor, California

**How did you begin working in the pizza industry?**

I always say that the pizza industry found me. I was 18, in college and totally broke. I walked into the first restaurant I saw and asked if they were hiring. I was hired on the spot and the rest is history...

I'm no spring chicken to the pizza industry as I have been making pizza since 1997. I spent 21 years with Pizza My Heart and have recently started to make a name for myself with my own restaurant, Pizzaleah.

**What is something uniquely you that you have brought to the pizza industry?**

I feel like I've never wanted my style of pizza making to be defined by normal styles. I love to make hybrid styles and use a collaboration of techniques I've learned over the years.

**What's been your biggest challenge in the pizza business?**

Right now my biggest challenge is probably the same as everyone...hiring.

**What do you do to motivate your staff during these challenging times?**

I'm a big proponent of leading by example. If I work hard, they work hard but I also love to have fun. If my staff isn't having fun while they are working then I'm not doing it right now. I also make sure that any accolades I receive I give credit to my employees and make sure that those accolades are theirs as well. I couldn't do what I do without them.

**What area do you feel like you currently need to improve upon to continue taking your pizza business to the next level?**

Currently I'm trying to improve on my role as the owner of a company. I've always been in the mindset that I needed to actively work in the restaurant/kitchen day in day out. While I think it's very important that as the owner of the business I am hands-on and available to both my customers and employees, I sometimes let some of the more bureaucratic things I need to take care of as an owner slip through the cracks.

**What is something you've learned at Pizza Expo that has helped guide your business?**

I've been attending pizza Expo since 1999. My biggest takeaway has always been networking. It's a great place to meet other people in the industry and to share ideas.

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## Upper Crust – Akron, Ohio

### How did you begin working in the pizza industry?

When I was 15 years old I was looking for a job and the first place that hired me was a small pizza shop named Pizza BoGo.

### What is something uniquely you that you have brought to the pizza industry?

Something unique I have brought to the pizza industry is the “Super Crown.” I made a pizza at the 2019 Pizza Expo and I created a crown for it. We do a similar version of the pizza in our shops on a daily basis.

### What’s been your biggest challenge in the pizza business?

The biggest challenge we have experienced is the current labor market. It is and has been extremely difficult to find good help this past year.

### What do you do to motivate your staff during these challenging times?

We do everything we can to be extremely flexible with all of our employees schedules. Also we give bonuses to high performing individuals.

### What area do you feel like you currently need to improve upon to continue taking your pizza business to the next level?

I know that I need to improve on hiring and training. Also I need to work on creating systems and implementing them successfully into our business.

### What is something you’ve learned at Pizza Expo that has helped guide your business?

It didn’t so much help guide our business but at the 2018 and 2019 Pizza Expo I learned a lot about competing. From traveling with products or finding products on arrival to putting together a presentation for the judges.

I learned that there are a few different moving parts that have to come together to compete with the best of the best!

## Nicholas Franchi



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# Giovanni Cesarano

**King Umberto**  
— Elmont, New York

**How did you begin working in pizza?**

I was 16 years old eating all the food in the fridge and my Mom said “if you’re going to eat like that you need to go to work” so my Dad, who at the time was co-owner of King Umberto, gave me my first job in pizza.

**What’s been the biggest challenge in the pizza business?**

Finding staff has been difficult at times but it makes us as owners work harder, which I don’t mind. Working in the

pizza business never bothered me so if I have to help service customers, answer phones, or help make pizza it’s what I signed up for so I don’t complain. It also makes me appreciate the workers who’ve been with us a long time even more.

**What is something uniquely you’ve brought to the pizza business?**

It’s hard to be unique in a business where so much information is shared and seen on a day-to-day basis. With that being said my mother was a seamstress growing up, so I watched her make beautiful dresses and that was always inspiring for me. We’ve introduced some cool King Umberto gear like hats, t-shirts, and jackets.

**What do you do to motivate your staff during these challenging times?**

I basically tell them we have an opportunity to make people happy right now in a world where not too many happy things are happening. If our products and services bring joy to people’s lives with all that’s going on they should be proud of themselves.

**What is something that you’ve learned at pizza expo that helped guide your business?**

A LOT! I can’t point my finger to only one thing because there’s been so many, but every time I go to the Expo I come out a more informed and motivated pizza maker.

**What area do you think you need to improve on to take your business to the next level?**

Since the pandemic we’ve had an increase in production in pizza sales, so keeping the oven hot has been challenging. Cranking up the oven during peak hours and rotating the pies properly so they get the right bake is something me and my staff are currently getting better at day by day. We also ordered an additional pizza master so that should help us out a bit.



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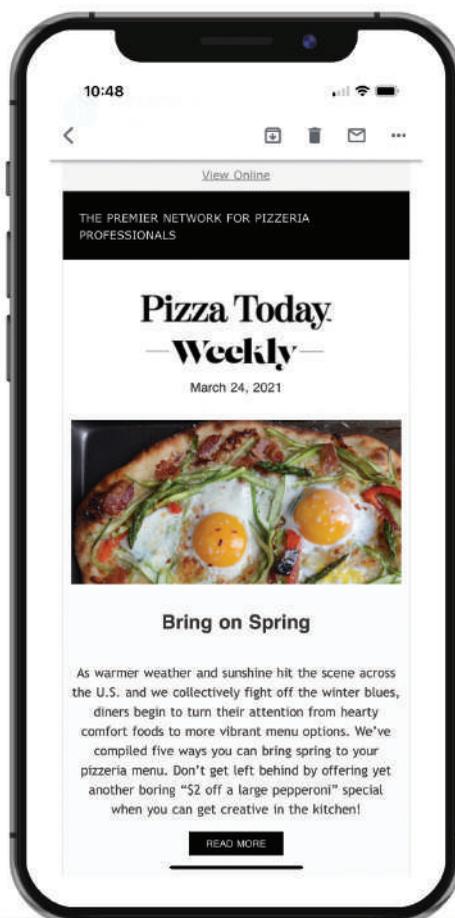
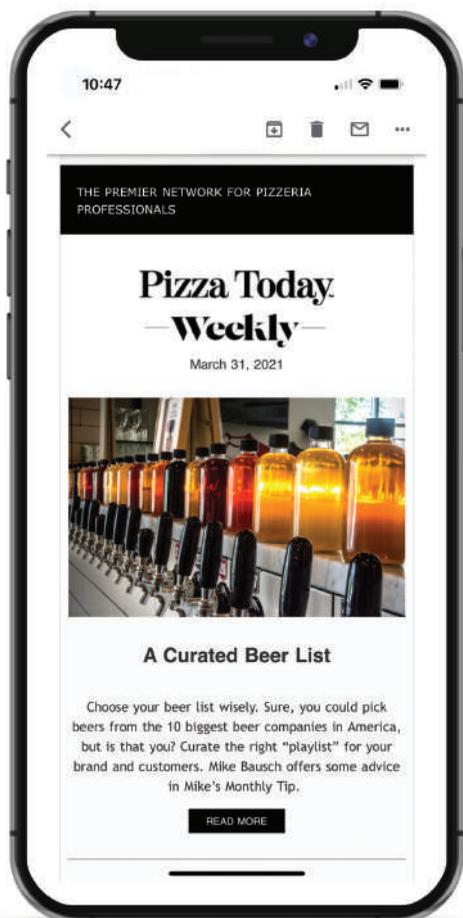
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# Represented

Creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace

By Daniel P. Smith  
Photos Josh Keown

One of the nation's largest private-sector employers, restaurants have long celebrated their role in promoting opportunity and diversity among the ranks.

And in so many ways, it rings true. Kitchens, counters and dining rooms at restaurants across the country are manned by individuals representing different races, ethnic groups, religions, sexual orientations and cultures, while the industry is rich in stories of individuals ascending the professional ladder.

Point 1: The restaurant industry stands among the nation's most diverse work sectors with minorities filling 47 percent of all positions, according to National Restaurant Association (NRA) data.

Point 2: Forty percent of restaurant businesses are majority-owned by minorities while two out of five managers and supervisors are minorities, reports the NRA, which touts greater minority leadership than any other sector of the U.S. economy.

The last year, however, has put diversity squarely on the docket of U.S. businesses. With social justice movements and consumer sentiment compelling a more thoughtful, critical look at labor and power structures, many businesses, including restaurants, have looked more deeply at diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) inside their operations.





## International Pizza Challenge



Interested in learning more about the International Pizza Challenge? Each year at Pizza Expo in Las Vegas, hundreds of pizza makers converge and go head-to-head in testing their pizza-making skills in a number of categories. From pan to non-traditional and everything in between, the gathering always rates high in creativity and competitiveness. If you'd like to learn more about the 2021 International Pizza Challenge, go to [PizzaExpo.com](http://PizzaExpo.com)



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## The value of workplace DEI

A growing amount of research literature ties workplace diversity to improved business performance, while there also exists growing support for businesses that pursue heightened diversity and representation with thoughtful initiatives.

In an oft-cited 2019 study published in the *Journal of the National Medical Association*, researchers found “positive associations between diversity, quality and financial performance,” including “improvements to innovation [and] team communications.” Other research, meanwhile, has noted the impact of workforce diversity on analytical thinking and innovation.

“When work environments are homogeneous, you don’t have the best of everyone,” says Kathleen Wilson-Thompson, the former head of human resources for Walgreens Boots Alliance and Kellogg who now helps companies unlock human potential and drive more diverse and equitable workplaces as a consultant.

A more diverse workforce can also help a business attract and retain employees, a particularly important reality given the industry’s notoriously high turnover rates and training costs. A 2020 survey from Manifest found that 70 percent of job seekers want to work for a company that demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion. This rings especially true for younger generations, who, having grown up in a more diverse world than Boomers and Gen X, largely see DEI as a business imperative.

Millennials and Gen Z not only want to work for companies committed to DEI, but are also choosing to spend their money with those who share their values. A recent study from Accenture focused on the retail sector – a worthy restaurant industry parallel – found that 54 percent of younger Millennials believe retailers have a responsibility to address wider social and political issues with regards to diversity, while more than half reported that they were more likely to shop at a retailer that demonstrated awareness of such issues. Nearly

one-third, meanwhile, said that staffing diversity influenced their shopping decisions.

The takeaway? If a business is not genuinely committed to DEI, then it could fail to reach its potential, struggle to attract and retain talent and see consumers take their dollars elsewhere.

## Cultivating a more diverse, equitable work environment

Given the tumult COVID-19 delivered, wherein 6 million foodservice jobs vanished at the onset of the pandemic, Wilson-Thompson reminds that restaurant employees enter a “new world order for labor.” As economies continue to reopen and dining rooms reacquaint themselves with guests, it is important restaurant workers feel appropriately trained and supported to deal with new regulations, rules and policies. While staff training might not be universally equated with DEI, Wilson-Thompson contends it stands just as critical a part of creating a stronger, safer work environment.

“How we bring these people back into the workplace matters,” Wilson-Thompson says. “To throw people out there without the necessary training invites issues. Restaurants need to help their people feel equipped for this and to think about the well-being and safety of themselves and others.”

Thereafter, Wilson-Thompson urges DEI-minded employers to consider how they advertise, interview and onboard employees, including asking – and listening to – feedback from current employees about their experience. She suggests leadership remove any barriers to entry, resist pigeonholing certain types of people into specific roles and provide management appropriate training to deal with workplace conflicts.

“If you don’t reflect on the entire lifecycle of your employees and the mechanics of this, then you open yourself up to complaints,” says Wilson-Thompson, adding that even a massive corporation like Walgreens conducted listening tours to better understand frontline worker issues. “The top doesn’t

have all the answers, which is why it’s so important to survey your workforce and listen to what they have to say.”

Listening to employees, valuing their feedback and making tangible change to create a more responsive work environment stands an important step toward inclusion, which Wilson-Thompson defines as “respecting and valuing employees.”

DEI also extends to respecting each individual’s unique qualities and identifiers and treating everyone equally. (While DEI is most associated with race, Wilson-Thompson reminds that diversity encompasses all different facets of one’s identity from religion and age to family dynamic and work experience.)

Wilson-Thompson urges restaurant leadership to provide the same opportunities to everyone. Consider who gains access to certain training opportunities or positions within the company and seek to broaden participation rather than limiting it.

“You don’t want to be doing things differently for different people,” Wilson-Thompson says. “If you really want to change the paradigm, then you need to remove any barriers to entry.”

So many businesses, Wilson-Thompson acknowledges, have their heart in the right place regarding DEI. They draft wonderful plans and put them on the wall, but then forget about them. She encourages restaurants to create an action plan rooted in their corporate culture and values set. This enables a business to move away from “checking boxes” to a more holistic and tangible DEI program with measurable results and real impact.

“You want to create a safe, accessible workplace where employees can thrive,” she says. “That’s when you create more diverse, equitable and inclusive work environments where everyone – the business, the employees and the customers – wins.” ■

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**DANIEL P. SMITH** Chicago-based writer has covered business issues and best practices for a variety of trade publications, newspapers, and magazines.

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FEATURE

# Restaurant insurance in the post-COVID era

How to keep costs down and protection up in today's climate

By Daniel P. Smith  
Photos Josh Keown

Interested in safeguarding his restaurant and his livelihood, John Panvino doesn't hesitate to invest in insurance.

The chef and owner of Trattoria Porretta in Chicago, Panvino knows thorough coverage for his business can save his tail should one of his delivery drivers get in an accident or hackers infiltrate his point-of-sale system. Insurance affords Panvino protection and peace of mind.

"You can't just sign on the dotted line and call it a day," Panvino says. "In the restaurant business, there are a million things you need insurance for and I want to know I'm covered."

Indeed, insurance can make or break a restaurant operation, challenging its health, if not its long-term viability.

## Contemporary insurance issues

COVID-19 has altered so much of the world and insurance is no different, where the virus stirred up dust that continues swirling.

According to Don Scaramastra, an attorney at Seattle-based Foster Garvey who represents clients in insurance-related litigation, the conventional policy covers direct physical loss of property or damage

to the physical building. These days, court battles are brewing coast to coast around the term "physical loss." Is a virus present in the restaurant a physical loss? What about one's inability to use the restaurant because of a government order?

While Scaramastra watches the courts taking different approaches, he also sees insurers largely retaining the same "physical loss" language. Many, he says, are "buttoning up" their policies and eliminating any murkiness through exclusions. Prior to COVID-19, for example, Scaramastra estimates that 70-80 percent of policies held a virus exclusion; now,

he cannot imagine a policy without a virus exclusion.

"It's an ultimate fortress for the industry," Scaramastra says, adding that while some insurers offer pandemic-related insurance, such coverage largely remains cost prohibitive. "I don't see a viable road for the insurance industry to willingly take on all of that risk."

Insurers are also trying to wrap their arms around restaurants' various pandemic-era pivots, such as meal kits, curbside pickup, selling liquor with off-premises orders, off-site dinners, online cooking courses and, of course, delivery, which surged over the last year. For restaurants running an in-house delivery service, the associated liabilities and necessary insurance can be costly, a reality that leads many to outsource delivery.

"These pivots are all potential new exposures that could change coverage and even bring additional premiums to the table," says Rosanne Boik of Chicago-based Kamm Insurance Group.

Additionally, Boik, who has been working with restaurants on insurance issues for more than two decades, is urging many of her clients to consider purchasing employment practices liability (EPL), which covers a business for sexual harassment, wrongful termination and discrimination among other charges.

"The industry is seeing wrongful termination claims go through the roof due to employees who were let go during the pandemic and not brought back, alleging that they were not rehired as a result of one of these charges," Boik says, adding that cyber insurance is another additional coverage area worth exploring given many restaurants' increasing reliance on digital technologies and the ongoing, global work of nefarious actors.

Boik also notes that insurance rates, which were climbing before COVID-19, continue to rise given the accelerating number of claims as well as mounting lawsuits against insurers tied

to business interruption.

"In some cases, we're seeing double-digit rate increases," Boik says.

To keep costs down and protections high in today's climate, restaurants should:

**Understand coverage** – and who's providing it. Scaramastra regularly encounters "sophisticated businesses" who simply do not understand the coverage they purchased, particularly so with business interruption insurance, while many others failed to carefully vet their insurance provider.

"You're buying a series of promises from a company to take care of you if something goes awry, so you don't want to deal with someone simply looking for an excuse not to pay," he says.

#### **Control the controllable risks.**

Look to safety issues of insurance, such as loss controls, slip and falls and kitchen incidents, and establish a culture of safety in the restaurant to minimize claims. If there are multiple incidents of cuts in the kitchen, for example, consider a staff training session on responsible knife use.

"Remember that employees aren't thinking about the boss' insurance premiums," Boik says, "but the boss can and should."

#### **Adopt a careful filing calculus.**

Boik suggests pursuing higher deductibles on property to minimize premium increases and to then be mindful of filing claims that might trigger premium increases.

"Let's say you have a \$1,000 deductible and then \$1,200 in awning damage. Is it worth it to file a claim for \$200 if your premium might go up?" she asks. "Insurance is typically there for big, catastrophic claims, so it might be wise to keep the focus there if you want to save on the premiums."

**Lean on a trusted broker.** Much like having the right accountant or

attorney, the right insurance agent, particularly one familiar with the restaurant industry, can offer thoughtful counsel on appropriate coverage that addresses common industry risks.

"It's a good idea to think about things you're worried about, hear what the broker thinks you should be considering and then have a thoughtful exchange about the products that address risk," Scaramastra says. ■

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**DANIEL P. SMITH** Chicago-based writer has covered business issues and best practices for a variety of trade publications, newspapers, and magazines.

### **IS BUSINESS INTERRUPTION INSURANCE REALLY NECESSARY?**

As COVID-19 forced restaurant closures across much of the U.S., many owners were surprised to learn that their business interruption insurance offered no relief.

"Business interruption insurance has to be triggered by a direct physical loss of property. If there's no physical damage, then there's no business interruption insurance," explains veteran restaurant insurance agent Rosanne Boik.

As restaurants learned of this, incredulously discovering that their business interruption insurance did not cover the greatest business disruption of the last century, many responded with lawsuits. While courts across the country continue hearing cases, many operators question the validity of business interruption insurance altogether.

Boik, however, continues urging her clients to retain business interruption insurance.

"You want coverage in place for incidents that are included in your policy form, such as storm damage, a fire or a car crashing into the restaurant," she says. "That's when that coverage kicks in and can help immensely."

FEATURE

# Embracing Authenticity

Ingredients that Make a Difference

By Rachel Hartman  
Photos Josh Keown



**A**long with purchasing more pizza in 2020, consumers took an increased interest in their food selection. As we roll through 2021, diners are demanding authenticity, according to Ardent Mills, a national flour supplier. Furthermore, 50 percent of Americans note that they want to make healthier food choices, per the report “The State of Pizza Nation in 2021” by Alive & Kickin’ Pizza Crust, a pizza dough supplier.

Sorting through these trends reveals several action steps that can be taken to better delight pie lovers. Firstly, assuming an authentic approach might appeal to pizza seekers. “Being authentic means having a strong brand identity which resonates with the values of your core customers,” says Matt Bertram, CEO and SEO strategist at EWR Digital, a marketing agency that works with several companies in the food industry, including local pizzerias. “Brands are perceived as more authentic when their message is created by the people they’re targeting rather than for them.”

Standing out as authentic, then, often begins by turning a careful eye to the menu. If customers feel it is important to eat healthy, they’ll pay extra attention to your ingredient list and food selection. “Young adults today are more brand-savvy than any previous generation and feel a sense of ownership of their chosen brands,” Bertram says. If they find fresh ingredients and healthy options, they may be more inclined to make your place a go-to dinner choice week after week.

**Sourcing authentic food.** “Noble Pie Parlor took an authentic approach to its menu and recipes from the start,” says Ryan Goldhammer, owner of the three-pizzeria location in Reno, Nevada. “We pride ourselves in the research that we performed, the traditions we upheld, and the innovations we fostered.” While the dough recipe used in Noble Pie Parlor was gifted from Sicily, Goldhammer oversaw the adjustments needed to make it work in

his area. In addition, “We researched pH levels and terroir when sourcing tomatoes,” he adds. “We nurtured ideas for recipes and menu changes from our families, friends, and staff.” The arrangement has continued, with Noble Pie Parlor continuing to refine its offerings. Today these menu options include items geared toward vegan, keto and gluten-free preferences. “There is a little something for everyone,” Goldhammer says.

“When we first opened in 2009, our goal was to offer 75-percent organic ingredients,” says Ralph Santell, owner and operator of the three-location Tampa Pizza Company. “Today, all-natural, health conscious choices are peppered throughout our full-service menu, from vegan cheeses to gluten-free brownies. We wanted our food to be accessible and enjoyed universally, even by those who couldn’t eat traditional pizza ingredients.”

**Conveying your choices.** Perhaps you’ve selected your oils based on healthy criteria (in addition to flavor) or are using ones marked as USDA Certified non-GMO EVOO. “It is a great marketing opportunity to share that information with customers, especially since much has been written about the health benefits of olive oil,” says Joseph Basile, CEO of Catania Oils, a supplier of vegetable and olive oils to hundreds of pizza shops and chains across the country.

At Tampa Pizza Company, “All relative menu items are marked with a fun gluten-free, dairy-free or vegan icon, making them stand out,” Santell says. The place also provides educational messaging surrounding the approach to strict food preparation and local ingredient sourcing. “We’ve done everything from local farmers market pop-up events to hosting pizza-making classes,” Santell says.

The best marketing tool, however, tends to come from the customers themselves. “Over the years, we’ve had so many guests travel an hour-plus to dine with us—and they always make

sure to let us know it was worth the trip,” Santell adds. “Of course, we’re on social media, but word of mouth is huge for us.”

### **Giving customers fresh choices.**

At Stoner’s Pizza Joint, a growing pizza chain serving the Southeastern United States, the menu includes a BYOS (Build Your Own Salad). Diners can choose from a list of 18 toppings, including different types of meats, cheeses and vegetables, and six salad dressings, to create their own meal. “We prepare the salad in the kitchen to keep all ingredients as fresh as possible and ensure safety protocols,” says John Stetson, CEO of Stoner’s Pizza Joint. Customers often opt for pizza-inspired versions, like a Hawaiian salad with pineapple and ham or a meat lovers arrangement with bacon, sausage and pepperoni mixed in with the greens.

To provide customers with fresh ingredients, the place has taken on several strategies. “We pride ourselves on high-quality ingredients prepared in-house daily,” Stetson says. “We receive our food ingredients from our food distributor twice weekly to maintain the freshest quality. We also put a ton of research into who we get our ingredients from and making sure that our products are only made from the best.”

Taking the time to gather those fresh ingredients and let customers know about them can lead to an authentic dining experience for health-conscious diners. “There is no greater compliment than your guests walking in to your joint with awe and wonder as they take it all in...full mouths murmuring ‘mmhmm, mmmm’ with an ‘Okay’ or ‘thumbs up’ when you ask, ‘How is everything?’” Goldhammer says. “That is the total experience of authenticity.” ■

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**RACHEL HARTMAN** is a freelance writer who covers small business, finance and lifestyle topics.

# PRODUCT SHOWCASE



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## Burke Corporation Launches New Plant-Based Alternatives

Burke Corp. (Nevada, Iowa) a subsidiary of Hormel Foods Corporation (NYSE: HRL) and an industry leader in foodservice fully cooked meat toppings and ingredients, announced the launch of new Burke™ Alternatives plant-based products available to foodservice operators across the country. Powered by pea protein, Burke™ Alternatives include a fully cooked crumble and uncooked ground products with traditional or Italian flavored options, have no allergens and offer versatile flavor that works on any menu. "The bottom line is that people want to add more plants to their diet, but they also want them to taste great," Thielking added. "The new plant-based products are great options for foodservice operators to be able to offer unique and delicious plant-based options for their patrons. These products are ideal for pizza toppings, tacos, sandwiches, soups and more." To request a sample, visit [alternatives.burkecorp.com/plant-based](http://alternatives.burkecorp.com/plant-based).



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<sup>1</sup> Technomic Pizza Consumers Trend Report, 2018



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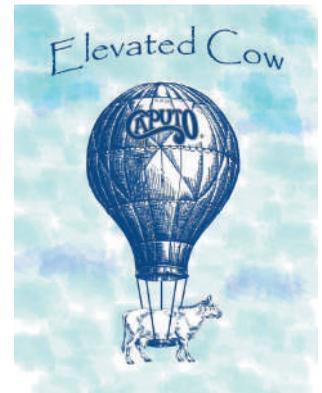
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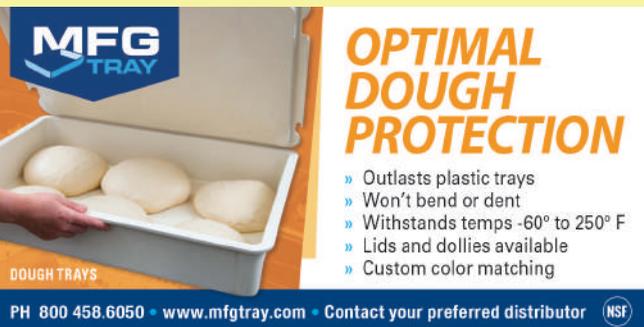


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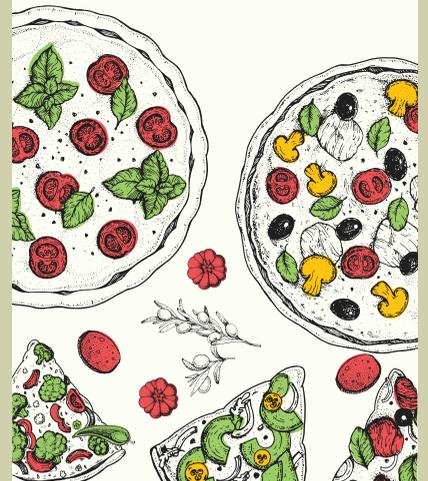


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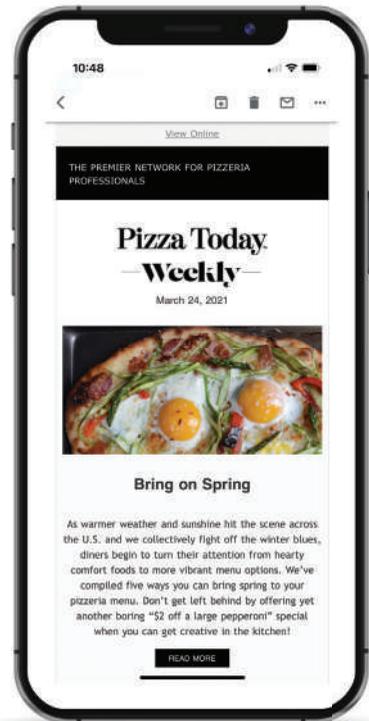
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Andolini's specializes in high-end ingredients, specialty beers and a welcoming atmosphere, while catering to budget conscious families. Mike's commitment to an exceptionally high-quality process and ingredients delivers a unique dining experience based on exceptional service, a great atmosphere and above all else great food.

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