

## Second slice – Santarpio’s will open another location in Peabody Family hopes to open new restaurant in May at old Bennigan’s site

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By John Lynds

While some things at Santarpio’s Pizza in East Boston have changed—the duct taped seat cushions have been replaced with wood benches, gone are the gerber baby food cheese shakers and the wine that was once in a box is now served from a bottle—there is one thing that will never change and that’s the pizza.

For over 100 years Santarpio’s, or Tarps’ if you’re from East Boston, has been serving up quality no frills grub from its location on Chelsea Street. The famous local eatery has gained the reputation of being an unpolished oasis that has refused to age with the time (except for the minor updates mentioned earlier).

Now, the Santarpio family is taking their 100-year tradition north.

Santarpio’s is opening a second location in Peabody at 71 Newbury St. right off the highway in the building that used to house Benningan’s.

“We thinking everything should be done in May,” said Carla Santarpio. “It’ll be the same menu as the one here in East Boston. We’ll start with the three items that made Santarpio’s pizza famous—pizza, lamb and sausage and we’ll make changes in the future if we have to.”

As far as decor, Carla said the new ‘Tarps will be as close to the original as possible.

“It’ll be tough to duplicate but we’ll try out best,” said Santarpio.

Carla’s father, Frank, joked he’d move right into the new establishment tomorrow if he could.

“I told my kids not to buy any new furniture because the furniture in there now is great—the chairs are banged up, the tables are wobbly, it’s already got the Santarpio’s feel,” said Frank. “There going to be a lot of work to do but if everyone’s willing to work it will be a success.”

And if the success in Peabody is anything like Santarpio’s success here in the family should be proud.

On any given night during the week the line to get into Santarpio’s can sometimes stretches around the block. Inside the cozy joint, the walls are covered with wood paneling and pictures of boxing legends.

The jukebox plays mostly Sinatra, Dino and Tony Bennett and the veteran waiters sing along to “Strangers in the Night” and “That’s Amore”.

The bill of fare has always been simple and since it was turned into a pizza place in 1966 there’s only been a few deviations from the main staples of pizza, grilled-lamb or sausage and beer.

“I think keeping it simple has worked this far,” said Frank when the pizzeria turned 100 in 2003. “I can’t really cook anything else so you get what you get.”

Santarpio’s has come a long way from an Italian bakery that opened in 1903 on the corner of Chelsea and Porter Streets.

In 1933, Frank’s father, Joseph, one of six children took over the establishment and revamped the building, turning the bakery into Santarpio’s Café, a popular bar among residents and sports fanatics.

Every once in a while patrons of Santarpio’s Café could expect a visit from one of their favorite boxers.

From Rocky Marciano to Jack Dempsey, legendary fighters would pop in for a cold beer and a quick photo opportunity throughout the late 40s and early 50s.

It was during this time the food started to catch on.

“My father use to make the tripe on Saturdays and they had the pizza and grill,” said Frank. “I guess it just sort of caught on from then.”

In 1966, the restaurant went through another facelift when Frank took over, ultimately bearing the name Santarpio’s Pizza.

“We put the sign up with the last \$700 I had and that’s when it really caught on,” said Frank.

Along with the sign came a wave of success that hasn’t stopped for nearly four decades.

“It’s my grandfathers pizza recipes and it hasn’t changed,” said Frank. “The only thing that has changed is we got rid of the old brick oven that was used for the bakery.”

Frank said that everything is handmade; from the sausages to the pizza dough, there’s no cutting of corners.

“We even cut the lamb,” said Frank. “We get the same lamb as Grill 23. They get the tenderloin and ours is a little chewy, tasty but chewy. So I tell people to get a lamb and a sausage then they’ll be half full before they’re ready for a pizza.”

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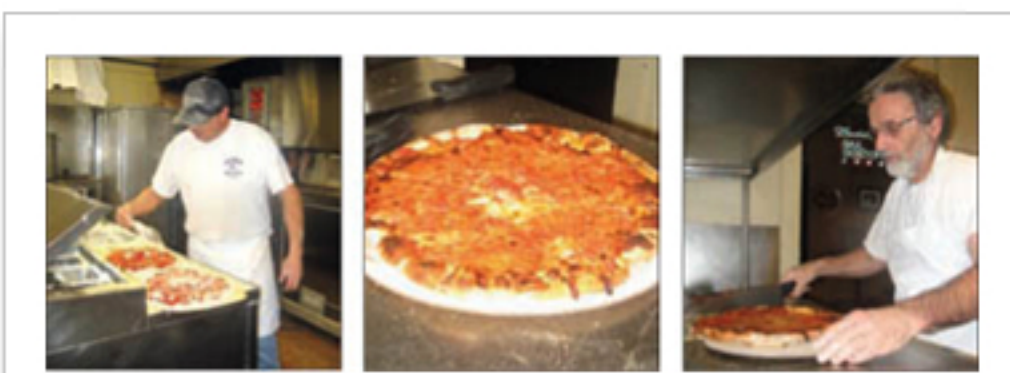
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From left: Santarpio’s Pizza cook Paul Baglio prepares a traditional pizza; the finished product, a traditional cheese pizza; Rocky Vitale cuts the endless line of pizzas coming out of the oven for the dining room.

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