

Pizza chef enjoys a slice of success

Written by Julie Weisberg

Thursday, April 02, 2009



When it comes to award-winning pizza, Joe DeVellis has the perfect recipe.

DeVellis — chef and co-owner of Giove's Pizza Kitchen in Fairfield, Shelton and Trumbull — took top honors for best traditional pizza in the United States at a recent international pizza-making competition.

DeVellis, who also is a co-owner and chef at Trattoria Carl Anthony in Monroe, competed against 60 other pizza makers from across the nation and around the world at the International Pizza Expo in Las Vegas last month.

In addition to taking top U.S. honors, the Shelton resident's "Pizza Pizziola" also placed second in the world for best traditional pizza.

"And many of the chefs I competed against were previous finalists," he said. "It's a tough competition."

This was the third time that DeVellis has competed in the pizza expo.

The first two times, however, who grew up in Bridgeport, had a strong showing but did not qualify for the final round.

And so, DeVellis had only brought with him enough ingredients for the first round.

But after he became one of the eight chefs to advance to the final round this year — earning one of the highest scores out of the 60 first round competitors — he quickly called back home to Connecticut to have his specific ingredients packed in dry ice and then shipped out to the Las Vegas convention center's kitchen.

DeVellis said he did not want to use any other ingredients than the top-quality ones used in his family's restaurants.

"I had to tell them, 'Send more dough and spices,'" he said with a laugh. "I didn't want to run out."

For the traditional pizza competition, while each chef could choose any cheese blend or type of crust they liked — DeVellis used the same crust and cheese he does at Giove's and Carl Anthony — they were required to incorporate a red sauce and any of the following two toppings: pepperoni, sausage, bacon, peppers, onions, olives, or ham.

The award-winning Pizza Pizziola (Pizziola means "pizza maker" in Italian) consisted of DeVellis' own house special red sauce, kalamata olives, roasted red peppers, fresh mozzarella, and a blend of herbs and spices.

"And that was it," he said.

DeVellis said while it was exciting to have such a successful competition this year, the real fun is the challenge of making, baking and then explaining his pizza in front of a live audience of hundreds of

people, as well as the judges from Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in Las Vegas.

“I like to try to constantly improve myself,” DeVellis said of his culinary skills, adding that competitions provide ample opportunities for chefs to share new techniques with each other.

In 2004, DeVellis competed in the New York Pizza Show, where he finished as one of the top five finalists.

“I’m always going to learn something new... and you don’t have that opportunity that often,” he said.

### Family business

DeVellis has been involved in the restaurant business for most of his life. His grandfather owned and operated Cascella Bakery in Bridgeport for years. And his father ran his own wholesale food business that sold items to area restaurants.

DeVellis and his brother Sam, a Trumbull resident, would frequently work for their father, helping him make his daily runs.

“We used to sit on the back of the truck as kids,” he said.

When he was 13, DeVellis got his first paying job in a restaurant, working as a dishwasher. From there, he worked his way up to serve as a sous chef.

Then, in 1990, DeVellis’ cousin, Idilio, bought Giove’s Pizza Kitchen in Trumbull. The Trumbull resident asked DeVellis and his brother if they would like to become partners in the business. They agreed.

“We had never made pizzas before, but we both knew how to cook,” he said.

Over the next few years, the business expanded, opening two more locations, one in Fairfield and one in Shelton. Ten years ago, the family decided to purchase Carl Anthony in Monroe.

At the time they purchased it, the restaurant was primarily a pizza place. But while they kept the name, the brothers decided to expand the menu.

Since then, Carl Anthony has been named one of the Top 12 Italian restaurants in Connecticut by the New York Times, receiving a “very good” rating from the paper.

“We like to continue to educate ourselves, and we like to incorporate that variety into what we do,” DeVellis said. “But we also like to give people what they want.”

DeVellis said his winning Pizza Pizziola will soon find its way onto the menus of all three Giove’s, as well as Carl Anthony.

“First, I need to teach everyone how to make the pizza before we add it,” he said. “I want to make sure it’s done the right way.”

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