



Pizzas mushroom as snack favorite

by Phyllis Malamud

There've been French fries and goulash and wienerwurst and chile con carne. But of all the foreign foods introduced into the American melting pot, none has caught on quite so spectacularly as that tangy, tasty, piping-hot dish from Italy—pizza.

Spreading like a glob of melting mozzarella, the pizza-parlor business has grown into a booming \$3.5 billion industry from coast to coast in recent years. In the process, the Neapolitan delicacy may have lost some of its Italian character, but it has become as American as chop suey.

Purists may sneer at the pineapple-and-Canadian-bacon "Hawaiian Delight" pizza served at Shakey's on Hollywood's Santa Monica Blvd. But watch the sneer fade as franchise

owner William Tilley tells how he netted \$77,000 in his first 11 months in business. In fact, the 400-outlet Shakey's chain grossed a whopping \$73 million last year on sales of more than 23 million pizzas.

No matter how you slice it, that isn't pepperoni. Pizza now runs second only to hamburgers as America's favorite quick snack and, according to a Gallup poll, it is ahead among young people.

If Thomas Ciciarelli, executive director of the North American Pizza Association (NAPA) in Ann Arbor, Mich., has his way, the aromatic pie will soon be No. 1.

The association is cheerfully assaulting the burger and fried chicken stands with slogans like "Ban the Bun" and a projected comic strip called "Super Pizza" in which Peter Pepperoni and Mary Mozzarella outwit the evil Harry Hamburger and Charley Chicken. An association T-shirt proclaims "Pizza Makes Me Passionate."

The pizza phenomenon got its start when servicemen returning from Italy after World War II brought back an appetite for "pizza pie" (the word "pie" is actually redundant because pizza means pie in Italian). But the pizza didn't really catch on until chains started forming in the late 1950s.

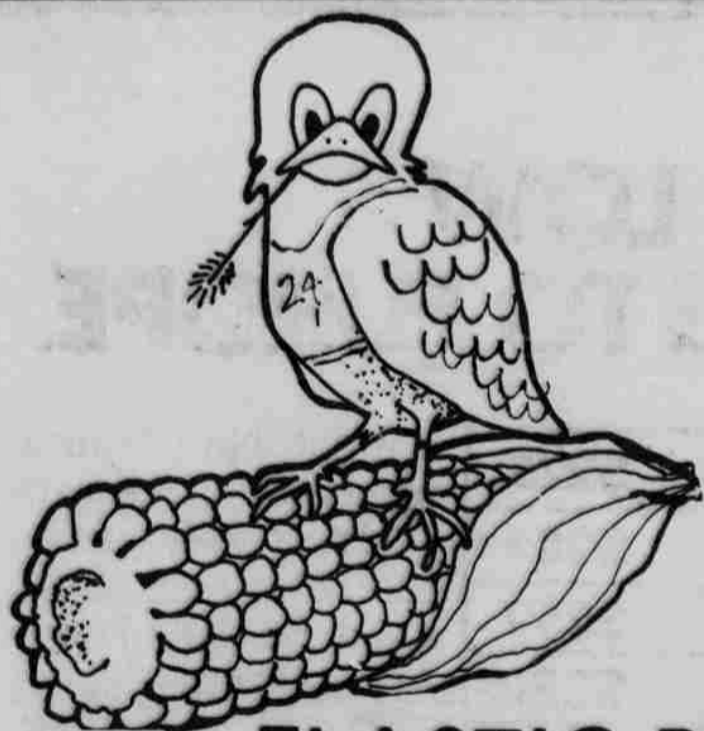
The Pizza Hut enterprise, started 13 years ago in Wichita, Kan., now has 698 red brick huts around the country and abroad. Chairman Dan Carney attributes the pizza-parlor boom to "personal involvement. You can pick it up with your fingers. And you can have a beer without feeling you're in a bar or something."

But the Shakey's chain, which is based in Englewood, Colo., has mixed in some showmanship with the basic appeal of the pizza to build its business. The motto of the chain, headed by former Robert Kennedy aide Joe Dolan, 49, is "family food and fun."

The typical Shakey's has silent movies, Gay '90s piano and banjo music, and a "kiddie korral" where youngsters can watch the cooks throw lumps of dough at the window and twirl the disks in the air to form a nickel-thin crust. The menu offers 21 varieties, including the "Jalapene" (with Mexican chilies) and the "bullfighter's special" (with Spanish sausage) and one with Louisiana shrimp.

These kinds of unorthodox recipes, interestingly, don't sell at all well in areas that have large Italian populations. Dolan explains that most traditional Italian pizzas are bland and that Italians find the American chain variety too spicy.

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