

Val's blends secrets into tasty success

By Jane Owens

The first day Valentino's Pizza Parlor opened, its owner was "rather discouraged." He had sold only eight pizzas.

Seventeen years later, Val's had sold a record 7,200 pizzas in one day.

"It was one Friday last March while state basketball tournaments were on. That day was so incredible, I still remember it. We had to call the whole staff in here to work," said Tony Messineo, co-owner of Valentino's.

Messineo and his brother Ron became partners in Val's in 1970. Since then, the pizza parlor's volume of business, adjusted for inflation, has increased 80 to 90 per cent, he said.

Started in 1956 by Val and Zena Weiler, the pizza parlor has never done any major advertising.

"Our advertising is done by word of mouth," he said. "The money we save (by not advertising), we put into the cost of our food supplies."

For example, Messineo said the cheese used on a Valentino's pizza costs about 20 cents a pound more than that used by other pizza parlors in Lincoln.

"When you figure we use 8,000 pounds of cheese each week, that cost starts to add up," he said.

Valentino's also buys only high quality ground beef, ham and other ingredients, he said.

"In fact, we can't afford to feed our employes on the hamburger pizzas customers buy," he said. "We give them a cheaper grade hamburger from grocery stores instead."

In addition to using only high quality ingredients, Val's has two other success secrets, according to Messineo.

"The first is our recipes," he said. All were developed by Mrs. Weiler, who is "innately the best cook you'll ever meet."

Because the recipes are top secret, only the Messineos and the Weilers are allowed to prepare the doughs and sauces, he said.



A familiar sight to most UNL students—Valentino's Pizza Parlor

Special blends of spices are kept in a locked basement to prevent other persons from duplicating them.

"We once had an employe try to walk out with a bag of spices," Messineo said, "but luckily, we caught him before it was too late."

Val's pizza recipe is a modification of the authentic Sicilian type, he said.

"Instead of the mozzarella cheese we use, Sicilians would use romano, and their pizza crust would be about half an inch thick," he said.

Although the authentic Sicilian recipe might be popular with ethnic groups on the East coast, Messineo said it probably "wouldn't go over here. And you know what they say about 'When in Rome...'"

The other success secret?

"My brother and I just never leave the

restaurant," he said. "With all the steps involved in pizza making, you constantly have to supervise everyone from the oven man to the pizza cutter."

Sixty-five to 80 of Valentino's 180 employees work at any one time, he noted.

"Our total volume of business is greatest on Saturdays," he said, "but we're usually hit hardest per hour on Sundays about supper time."

Customers order pizzas topped with any combination of the 15 ingredients available, he said.

"You really come up with some weird combinations, but then I guess it's everyone to his own taste."

The more traditional hamburger pizza, often combined with other ingredients, still seems to be the most popular, he said, "but lately, pepperoni is really pushing it."

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