



All in the Family

For three generations, the family behind Angelo's Pizza has been serving delectable food to communities across South Jersey. *by Matt Cosentino*

Like many of his countrymen before him, Salvatore Cusumano was simply searching for a better life for his family when he left Sicily for America in 1959.

What he couldn't have known at the time is that the move—and eventually the brave decision to open his own business—would wind up having a tremendous impact that continues to be felt almost 60 years later.

Cusumano passed away earlier this year, but his legacy lives on at Angelo's Pizza, which has five locations in South Jersey that are owned and operated by his sons Tony, Pino and Rich and his grandson Sal.

"I'm very proud of my father, without a doubt," Pino Cusumano says. "This was his dream and then it became our dream, and now we're living it."

Salvatore Cusumano arrived at Ellis Island and settled in Brooklyn, N.Y. With his wife and two oldest sons still back in Sicily—Rich had not been born yet—he took a job in construction and helped build the World Trade Center.

He added a night job at a pizzeria to learn the ins and outs of the restaurant business, and discovered soon enough that it was his

true calling. So he went to his foreman and told him he was leaving construction to open Riccardo's Pizza with his brothers-in-law in Brooklyn.

His grandson Sal Cusumano heard that story many times, and it left quite an impression.

"His foreman told him, 'If you leave, I never want to see your face again. Not because I don't like you, but because I'll know you have failed,'" Sal says. "After years of being in business, my grandfather and great-uncles were very successful, so he went back to his foreman and brought him back a block of Sicilian cheese called *caciocavallo*. It's a very expensive cheese and it's what Sicily is known for. He said, 'I wanted to thank you for the opportunity when I first got to America, and I wanted you to know that I made it.'"

"That's one of my favorite stories about my grandfather and it shows the immigrant experience of coming to America and making the most of your opportunity. I think it's one of the defining moments of his life."

Riccardo's expanded with several locations in Willingboro and the Cusumano family moved out of Brooklyn and made their home in South Jersey. It was there that Tony,

Pino and Rich grew up working in their father's restaurants.

"I worked there every weekend for four years of high school, I worked on holidays and in the summertime," Tony Cusumano says. "I liked everything about it. I was born into this business."

"I knew at an early age I wanted to do this, because I grew up in the business," adds Rich Cusumano, who was folding pizza boxes at age 11 and making his own pies by the time he was 13. "It's almost like I had a natural talent for it."

When Tony and Pino were old enough, they opened their own shop, called Brothers Pizza, in Paulsboro. After selling that they bought their first Angelo's location in Riverside in 1982, followed by two more shops in Mount Laurel, with Rich coming on board.

From the beginning, they had the same dedication to their craft as their father had, and that's part of the reason Angelo's has thrived for more than 30 years.

"He instilled work ethic in us," Pino Cusumano says. "For years and years, we all worked six days a week, 12 or 14 hours a day. He felt the eye of the owner was very important. We made our own dough and sauces and were watching out over everything, and we learned that from him."

Tony's son Sal, like his father and uncles, paid close attention to his grandfather's lessons. His maternal grandfather, Giuseppe Randazzo, also owned a pizzeria, and needless to say he couldn't escape the family business.

"I was born with pizza sauce in my blood," he says.

Sal Cusumano started out as a busboy and also washed dishes and answered the phones. He eventually worked his way up to

manager while he was a student at Rowan University and continued in that role after graduation.

For a few years in his mid-20s, Sal Cusumano left the family business to work for a cheese company, and was able to visit other pizzerias up and down the East Coast in his position. In 2012, he was ready to come back and rejoin Angelo's.

"I worked in corporate America, I saw everything I needed to see in other pizzerias and helped them grow their businesses," he says. "Instead of helping other people grow their businesses, I wanted to do it myself. So we started looking for places to buy, and in 2012 we bought Frank's in Berlin and changed it to Angelo's. That's when I came back and joined the Angelo's business."

Sal Cusumano opened a Voorhees location in 2016, which is also run by his mother Francesca. All five Angelo's restaurants continue to provide great food in a family atmosphere.

"The menus might change a little bit here and there, but the recipes are all the same," Rich Cusumano says. "We use all the same types of sauce blends and flour and cheese, which is all top quality. And we put our own twist on everything."

That includes the Grandma pizza, an invention of Tony Cusumano's that combines provolone, mozzarella and Parmigiana cheeses with flavorful sauce on a Si-

cilian crust.

"My grandmother stretched out a piece of dough one time when I was young and she had some cheeses at home," Tony Cusumano says. "She just mixed it together, threw some sauce on top and put it in the oven. About five years ago I started thinking about that, so I made one at work and stuck it under the display and called it the Grandma pizza. Ever since then it's been a good seller."

The Grandma pizza and other Angelo's specialties could eventually find their way to other areas of South Jersey, as Sal Cusumano has not ruled out expanding further. For now he is focused on honoring both of his grandfathers: He gives a leadership award every year in Randazzo's name to a Berlin Community School student, and every day tries to run his business the way Salvatore Cusumano taught him.



"All the support they gave me, I never want that to be forgotten," he says. "They both had a great influence on me."

"The two generations before me gave me this opportunity, from my grandfathers to my father to my uncles. I am forever thankful to them for all they have done to get us here. I owe it to them to keep pushing the family legacy to new heights and one day preparing the next generation for greatness." ■

Angelo's Pizza

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