

# PIZZA EXPO XL



**MARCH 19-21, 2024**

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## BUSINESS BUILDERS: HOLIDAY FAVORITE "WAITING LISTS"

Especially at Easter and Christmas, many of Luigi Vitrone's old school Italian regulars crave holiday favorites like eel, tripe, sweetbreads, and even roasted lamb's head. However, few Italian restaurants in Luigi's area still offer these old country specialties.

quantities and whether they prefer the items to be packaged for immediate enjoyment or to freeze for later. (Calling each guest personally also allows Luigi to further cultivate their relationship.) Every year, order quantities and grateful compliments have grown!

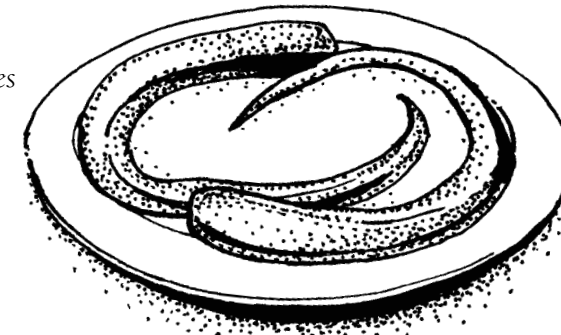
Editor's note: Whether online or via phone, curating similar niche-specific "waiting lists" can also help attract fans to specialty wine tastings, wild game or regional dinners, unique pop-ups, and other "limited availability" events!



To satisfy this untapped niche, Luigi actively builds a separate holiday "waiting list" for each specialty. Throughout the year, Luigi encourages regulars to add

their phone numbers to be contacted when he next prepares each delicacy. Then two weeks prior to preparation, he calls for their advance to-go order

Luigi Vitrone, Owner  
Luigi Vitrone's Pastabilities  
Wilmington, DE



Share your proven business-building tips and if we publish your idea, we'll send you \$100! Your tip can deal with any aspect of your business as long as it has added to your success. While we would like to give you credit, we will respect your wishes to remain anonymous if you prefer.

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# LA TRATTORIA®

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## Sharing Success: Thoughts from Tom Cortopassi

### "Defining Loyalty – Thoughts from Uncle Dino"

My Uncle Dino deeply enjoyed sharing business wisdom with Independent restaurateurs in La Trattoria.

One of his columns in which I learned an important business lesson was titled "Defining Loyalty" and written in 1995.

Independents have always had to choose between seeking customers who value quality more than price or those who care more about price than quality. Back in 1995, the pressing business issue wasn't economic uncertainty or cost inflation but how to respond to fierce price competition from deep-discounting national chains.

Even today, **Dino's definition of customer loyalty** helps explain why quality-oriented independents still can't afford to pursue consumers who care more about price than quality. Here are excerpts from Dino's original column:

#### Defining Loyalty

By Dino Cortopassi (September 1995)

Independents cannot afford to take customer loyalty for granted. So let us clearly define a "loyal customer" and why that helps you win the game!

**There are two kinds of customers, those who are "loyal" and those who are not.**

**A loyal customer values your offerings enough to buy them at a price which allows you to be profitable.**

**Conversely, consumers who will only buy your offerings at unprofitable prices, by definition, are not loyal, and you cannot afford to keep them!**

*Failing to understand this causes some businesses to throw good money after bad to attract/keep customers who cost more than they are worth.*

*Customers who are willing to buy from you at a fair price are loyal and you and your team should do everything in your power to satisfy them.*

**1) Loyal customers are more motivated by quality than cost.** Once introduced to superior quality food, loyal customers are self-motivated to return. On the other hand, price-oriented consumers must be continually enticed to return with below-cost prices.

**2) Loyal customers bring new business.** Once they consistently experience the quality superiority of your food, loyal customers go out of their way to promote your business with family and friends...who tell their family and friends...and so on. This word-of-mouth advertising costs you zero.

**3) Loyal customers buy more over time.** They tend to return more frequently, typically purchasing more per visit.

That is why it pays to continually strive to enhance their satisfaction to **keep them even longer.**

*Remember that your goal is not to attract and retain customers, it is to attract and retain loyal customers!*

*Here are a few ways to increase your retention of loyal customers.*

**1) Attract/keep loyal customers with superior food quality.** No matter how good your food quality is already, constantly strive to make it better to reinforce the loyalty of existing customers and attract more of the same. (You can never have too many loyal customers!)

**2) Send disloyal customers to your competitors.** Avoid discounting which only attracts disloyal consumers who cost you more than they are worth. As my mentor Frank Picullo used to say, "Let them go to our competitors and make them broke!"

**3) Help employees understand the value of loyal customers.**

Employees tend to treat customers with greater respect once they understand their true value to your business. Demonstrate how a loyal customer who spends \$40 a week is worth \$2,000 per year to the business! Making sure your employees appreciate the importance of truly satisfying every loyal customer every time helps build the quality of your service as well.

**4) Treat every customer as your BEST customer.** Every customer makes an individual value judgement regarding your quality and service. This is why in our business, each and every customer is treated with respect regardless of how many cases of our product they use. We believe customer loyalty must be individually and continually earned to ensure our own long-term success.

*My bottom line is "Don't try to be all things to all people." Just deliver your BEST to loyal customers who value your offerings and leave the rest to someone else!*

– Dino (September 1995)

Today, the burning issue may not be competing against deep-discounting chains. Instead quality-oriented businesses wrestle with how to maintain profitability despite economic uncertainty and/or having to raise prices to keep pace with inflationary pressures.

However, regardless of the challenge, I believe that Dino's strategic advice remains equally true today: "Always deliver your BEST to loyal customers who value your offerings and leave the rest to someone else!"

Until next time,  
Ciao!

*Tom Cortopassi*

Tom Cortopassi, President and Co-Owner



IDEA EXCHANGE FOR INDEPENDENT RESTAURATEURS

## SUCCESS STORY: NORM'S PIZZA, BROOKLYN, NY

In downtown Brooklyn, NY, head pizzaiolo and managing partner Rosario Viggiano runs a tiny, super-efficient slice shop called Norm's which has been steadily attracting more loyal repeat customers over time.

Running a slice shop can be ultra-competitive because profits are earned in cents (not dollars) per transaction. That is why slice shops depend so heavily on "foot traffic"-intensive locations. Luckily, Norm's is surrounded by plenty of large business and government office buildings.

With plenty of cheaper slices nearby, competing on price wasn't an option. Instead, Rosario focused on 1) creating unique ultra-premium slices capable of attracting customers who value quality over price, 2) charging an equally premium price, and 3) reinforcing a super-welcoming vibe so customers can't help but want to return!

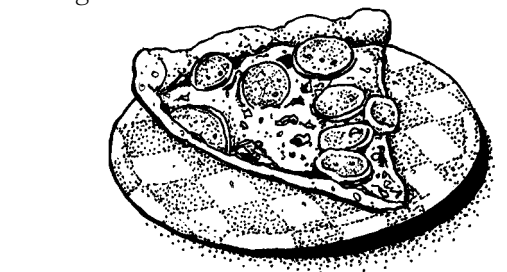
**Key Idea:** **Mindful innovation** – Besides seeking out the most consistently flavorful sauce, cheese, and toppings through blind tastings, Rosario has focused on **making his dough increasingly distinctive over time**. So rather than sticking to the identical dough recipe over time, Rosario is constantly experimenting with how different rise times, dough hydrations, and natural leavenings enhance finished dough flavor and texture. As a result, the crust at Norm's has continued developing greater character and complexity over time, making it increasingly distinctive from anything else around.

**Key Idea:** **Freshness Over Variety** – Because slice freshness (quality) is directly impacted by "holding time," faster-moving slice varieties average a bit fresher than less popular, slow-movers. So instead of emphasizing

"variety" by displaying 15 or 20 different pie choices, Rosario purposely maximizes slice freshness by narrowing his menu to his 8 most popular, highest velocity versions.

**Key Idea:** **Efficiency over Customization** – Especially during peak mealtimes, Rosario's goal is to cheerfully serve as many guests as quickly as possible. So Norm's menu is strictly limited to 8 **pre-determined** slice choices and craft sodas in bottles or cans. By not allowing substitutions or "build-it to order" options, Norm's keeps each rush hour transaction as simple and fast as possible.

**Key Idea:** **Welcoming Culture** – While a limited menu approach might sound impersonal, Rosario strives for his team to create the opposite experience. In hiring new people, he especially looks for upbeat attitudes and a willingness to work hard. As a former pizzeria employee himself, Rosario pays particular attention to his team's feelings and frustrations. In addition to making them feel valued, he encourages them to make eye contact, greet, and be kind to each guest.



**The Bottom Line** – Despite cheaper alternatives, Norm's continues to profitably grow by focusing on premium quality, unique flavor, seamless transactions, and a warm, welcoming environment!

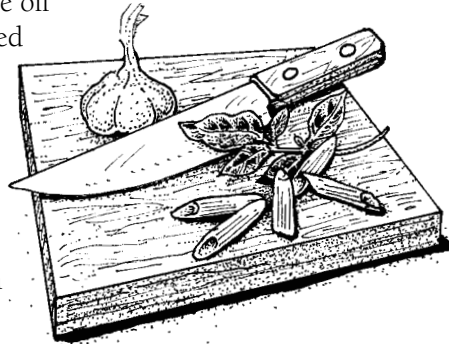
## LA VERA CUCINA: MAMA FLAVIA'S PENNE CON MELANZANE

In Rome after WWII, young Giovanni Galati's family was so poor, he and his siblings sometimes went to bed hungry. Still, Giovanni warmly remembers family dinners together, eating pasta with vegetables and tomato sauce on Sundays.

Giovanni's fortunes changed when an uncle needed help in America. After fulfilling that obligation, Giovanni has since spent every day gratefully pursuing a better life in St. Louis for himself and a family of his own. Now an accomplished restaurateur, Giovanni says that the fragrant aroma of eggplant and onion simmering together still magically rekindles fond childhood memories of helping his mother Flavia lovingly prepare his favorite *penne con melanzane*.

### Ingredients:

- 4 small Japanese eggplants
- ½ cup fall harvest extra virgin olive oil
- ½ cup yellow onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 10 fresh basil leaves, chopped
- 1 pound dry penne
- 1 cup pecorino Romano salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ cup pine nuts, toasted
- more basil and pecorino for garnish



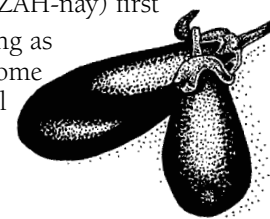
### Instructions:

Wash and peel eggplants; then coarsely chop. In skillet over medium flame, heat olive oil. Add eggplant, onion, and garlic. Sauté for 15 minutes until onions soften. Add salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat. Stir fresh basil leaves through mixture.

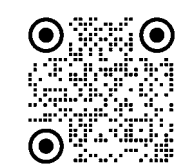
Boil large pot of lightly salted water. When water boils, add dry penne. Cook about 9 minutes until reaching al dente stage. Strain off water, reserving 1 cup pasta water to add back if pasta becomes dry. Place half of eggplant mixture into pot with pasta, toss thoroughly. Place pot over medium flame to thoroughly warm. Add back pasta water as needed. When mixture bubbles, add pecorino Romano; stir well. Place pasta and eggplant mixture on a platter; top with second half of eggplant. Garnish with toasted pinenuts, additional basil and pecorino, and enjoy! Serves 6.

### About Eggplant:

The purple skinned eggplant or *melanzane* (mell-an-ZAH-nay) first became a staple of Sicilian and Southern Italian cooking as early as the 9th century AD. The seeds and skins of some larger varieties may impart a bitter alkaloid flavor until salted and soaked. That is why St. Louis restaurateur Giovanni Galati seeks out smaller, far milder Japanese varieties which he uses without salting or peeling.



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## BUSINESS BUILDERS: "SLICE OUT HUNGER"

As a self-taught pizza historian, founder of Scott's Pizza Tours in NYC, and popular speaker at Pizza Expo, Scott Wiener has earned the respect and friendship of hundreds of independent pizzerias. So when Scott became aware of how many people across North America go hungry daily, he asked his many pizzeria friends to help fight "food insecurity" in their own neighborhoods. The result was his charitable organization "Slice Out Hunger."



In 2009, Slice Out Hunger began by raising money for NYC hunger relief organizations by selling pizzas donated by NY pizzerias by the slice at local community events.

Since then, Slice Out Hunger has grown internationally to include hundreds of pizzerias by creating a calendar of charitable events which neighborhood pizzerias can use to support their own local soup kitchens and food banks.

The only cost to pizzerias volunteering to join Slice Out Hunger is pledging to locally donate 30 pies or \$300 to the neighborhood relief organization of their choice.

**Key Idea:** While many Independents already support charitable causes, an advantage of participating in Slice Out Hunger events is that they provide an easy way for restaurateurs to publicly demonstrate neighborhood support without appearing self-promoting.

One such event is called "Pie it Forward" which gives pizzerias an organized format for donating pizzas directly to local foodbanks or other charitable groups. (This approach sometimes also provides opportunities to share photos of the event with their loyal regulars via social media.)

Slice Out Hunger has also begun providing "rapid relief" to victims of natural disasters, like the recent Maui wildfires, by helping channel donations to relief groups directly feeding victims and first responders in the affected areas.

In little over a decade, hundreds of Slice Out Hunger member pizzerias have raised and distributed more than \$1.3 million to help fight hunger insecurity in their own neighborhoods. And in 2015, Slice Out Hunger incorporated into an official tax-deductible 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

While Scott continues to donate his time, SOH's headquarter operations have grown enough in recent years to now require one paid employee to keep everything organized. **We salute Slice Out Hunger's many generous pizzeria members whose in-kind donations continue to benefit their local neighborhoods.**

Similarly, Stanislaus and Corto proudly sponsor Slice Out Hunger at their headquarters level to help this worthy organization cover their annual administrative costs.

**Pizzerias interested in learning more about Slice Out Hunger and its mission to fight local hunger insecurity in their own neighborhoods can visit [www.sliceouthunger.org](http://www.sliceouthunger.org).**

### If we publish your idea, we'll send you \$100!

La Trattoria's proven ideas come from successful Independent restaurateurs like you. What are you doing differently in your business (besides making great food) that adds to your success?! If we publish your idea, we'll send \$100 to say "Grazie!" Call me, La Trattoria Editor Steve Rouse, at (800) 328-8667!



## WHY INDEPENDENTS SHOULD CONSIDER ATTENDING PIZZA EXPO



Our Stanislaus and Corto Team at Pizza Expo 2023

### To Our Restaurateur Friends

Pizza Expo is a one-of-a-kind trade show focused on providing Independent pizzerias and Italian restaurateurs proven ideas and information of value.

For example, most of the top-quality educational seminars on everything from marketing to finding and keeping great employees are presented by other successful Independents.

This year's Pizza Expo is being held March 19-21 in Las Vegas, NV. (By the way, we don't happen to have any "free passes" or "discount tickets".)

If you have never attended, you might consider doing so. Many successful Independent operators have told us that attending Pizza Expo is a worthwhile investment for further enhancing the quality of their food and sharpening their business skills.

P.S. If you go to Pizza Expo, please come say "Hi!" to us and our team at Booth #2511. We look forward to seeing you!

For more information on attending **Pizza Expo** in Las Vegas, visit their website at [www.pizzaexpo.pizzatoday.com](http://www.pizzaexpo.pizzatoday.com)

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