

Papa Ceo's Pizzeria

Interview with: Matt (new owner since 2017)

Owners and founders, Tony and Cathy Bonventre founded Papa Ceo's in 1984. Both born in Sicily, they immigrated to Canada in their 20's. Wanting to provide for his family, Tony initially started in construction, but then quickly moved on to the food industry to continue his family's tradition of providing Italian food here in Ontario. His cousin and brother-in-law both worked in pizzerias in and around the GTA and it's where Tony was trained in the art of pizza making. What started as a necessity to survive as an immigrant quickly turned into a passion and Papa Ceo's was born. Named after a family relative of Cathy's from Italy, Papa Ceo's vision was to create a family run and operated pizzeria where delicious pizza is offered in their community. The community quickly responded to the opening of the pizzeria and an immediate clientele of students from the surrounding area along with a prominent Italian following could be seen in the early years. Today, the Italian community has dispersed and moved up north, but Papa Ceo's continues to be popular among students and their community.

Staying true to that original vision 37 years later, although Tony and Cathy have retired, their daughter (Piera) is still very much a part of the operation, alongside the new owner, Matt who took over in 2017. Tony's contribution to the Italian food scene varies, he's opened other pizzerias, notably Pizza Gigi's (which is now run by his cousin) and Cora Pizza (now run by his brother-in-law). Most of the pizzeria's have been kept in the family. When visiting Papa Ceo's for a slice, some of the best selling items are still Tony's original creations, one of which is called The Robert De Niro pizza. The original early recipes have stayed consistent as the best selling items on the menu, while newer pizza creations are also a hit.

While pizza has always been on the menu, there was a brief period of time when Papa Ceo's was renamed as Papa Ceo's: Fine Italian Foods. During this period, there was a change in the menu, a variety of sandwiches, pastas and lasagnas were offered alongside pizza. Though this did not last long as it was too time consuming and labor intensive for the family to be making all the food by hand, so they switched back to selling only pizza. Today, you can see that the menu has adjusted to the community's needs, as they offer sides, wings and drinks and a wide variety of thin crust pizzas. People come to enjoy the original recipe dough that Tony introduced and that has stayed consistent from the beginning. Due to the pandemic, there have been some changes, most notably walk-ins have decreased by 80% while delivery has increased. A social media presence and the addition of delivery apps has helped Papa Ceo's during the pandemic. In terms of the future, Matt wants to create a frozen pizza line with the same delicious flavour and taste everyone has come to love. Continuing Tony's legacy will always be at the forefront of the future for Papa Ceo's insuring that high-quality pizza that customers come to enjoy.