

Michele Pellegrini 0:14

So I am answer pretty much you can start anytime you want. Just I want to apologize in advance for my English that is still in progress. So I probably will do a lot of grammar mistake. So whatever's if you don't understand something, just say, "can you repeat?" and that's it.

Italian Canadian Foodways 3:02

Sounds good.

Italian Canadian Foodways 3:04

Who is the founder of your business? When was it founded?

Michele Pellegrini 3:13

So the founder, a owner, it's a group of Italian people, Italian-Canadian. That actually they own another restaurant, Touro, a Brazilian restaurant. It's a total Brazilian steakhouse. When I arrived in Canada in 2014, I started to work at Touro. And with the time like, we have this I have this idea of this specific concept of Italian restaurant. So I asked them where I can find the, you know, support, [the] money investor. And so I told them and they decided to invest and open another restaurant. And they asked me to run and we opened in September 2017.

Michele Pellegrini 4:11

Okay, and so obviously, you said you emigrated here in 2014?

Michele Pellegrini 4:16

Yes.

Italian Canadian Foodways 4:17

Where are you from in Italy?

Michele Pellegrini 4:56

moves to the patio

Michele Pellegrini 7:14

No you know I actually move to the patio because I want to stay alone when we talk. [The patio] is a very pretty background.

Michele Pellegrini 7:30

When the lockdown is over I'm going to come visit and see it.

Michele Pellegrini 7:33

I tried to build like a kind of Tuscany garden. So I have chosen 14 and obviously I am a background like in the restaurant. I ran a few restaurant in Italy. I own my own restaurant in Italy. And I decided to come here in 2014 honestly, at the beginning was the idea to do just an experience. I want to see like, you know, the industry in North America. How it was and so I start at the beginning because like was very close to the house that I find this restaurant [with] the name Tauro, a Brazilian steakhouse. I start there. Okay. And after three months, they move [me] into the kitchen. So I work to here in the kitchen and after the server and supervisor and then I told that the owner I had this idea. So I don't know if you read or something. But basically, the idea of Giro D'Italia, means "tour of Italy." So every month we change the menu, and we do our traditional dishes from one region of Italy. So technically, if you come once a month in one year, in our view, kind of do the tour of Italy with food any dish that's like that. So for every menu, so wherever menu we create, we match with the wine from the region we create. So the feature cocktail that we have at the restaurant is the Negroni that is the most famous Italian cocktail around the world. So, with my bartender, we created like 12 different Negroni, one for every main region with the traditional ingredients like Friulli instead the gin you

use the grappa, right? Oh, Calabria, we have a Negroni but we put the pepperoncini inside, from Abruzzo we put like inside the saffron because like it's we have this traditionally the best saffron in the world. Napoli we put the blood orange juice. So every region has one signature Negroni.

Italian Canadian Foodways 9:59

That's awesome. What region are you from?

Michele Pellegrini 10:03

I come from Abruzzo. Whole life, born and raised.

Michele Pellegrini 10:10

Wow. Okay, so obviously you guys have been open for almost 4 years. What was your business's original mission or vision and has that changed at all?

Michele Pellegrini 10:28

Okay, I'll tell you the truth, but you don't get me wrong, okay. Okay. Because every time I say these, like with my own or at the beginning was a little bit tough. So the point is basically this one it's like I understand that how's the things evolved with Canada because when the massive immigration come in 1959. I understand they have this idea of Italian food but they are trying to find the ingredients and they find all the things to make properly. So they start to create like a kind of fusion Italian food like chicken parmigiana, pasta lamonica, mac and cheese. And so obviously, when I arrived, I was shocked so when I came here, I see what went up. I was like, "Oh, no," I had a very bad night, at the time. And I say, "Well, I don't know if I can stay here."

Michele Pellegrini 12:16

So from there, when we opened the restaurant, the idea and the philosophy was one and one non-negotiable [only]. We, with my owner, we say we "want to do a real Italian restaurant." So I want to have like a dish that nobody has. I want to have experience that nobody, nobody gives you. Because pretty much I find that the other restaurant was pretty much the same. Mac and cheese, chicken parmigiana was pretty common. So they accepted the challenge, and when we opened this place, we have only 60 seats. And they told me like we'll see in three year how is going, how's the response, and eventually from there, we move on like with a bigger location on another location. And to be honest, Kate, the first, I want to say, four months was dramatic. I almost cry every night because people come at the restaurant and when they start to see the menu they was very confused and like kind of scared, right? Because they don't find the comfort zone with this food. So they start to ask [for] pizza pepperoni, but when you know we don't have pepperoni even, I don't understand what's like pepperoni. Pizza can be like say, "it's a pizza with sausage, right?" So same with the pasta, they start to ask for pasta a la vodka. And things that like [that but] from day one, we always say we don't do it, we don't accept this compromise. So I was honestly shocked because people leave kind of disappointed.

Michele Pellegrini 14:14

So my chef is from Bologna. Okay, the executive chef, my sous chef, is from Roma. I have two guys from Napoli, one guy from Puglia. One guy from Calabria. So we are representing a lot of different regions. Yeah, like everybody say, "wow, the place is nice like you feel that hospitality of Italia." But the food wasn't what they expect. So, I was worried that my big project was like messed up. So what's happening is like, my idea, it was like at the beginning I say, "Okay, you know what? I have a lot of big Calabrian community as my fueling community." So we start to do the region with more representatives. And so the idea is okay, we do collaborate with the people from Calabria, they come, we fill up the restaurant. Right? Okay. Yeah, they want to see their own [regional cuisine]. Maybe like, for example, your dad, is from Friulli but you went into

school married to someone from Sicily. So they start to like a double visit, right. Because like, the wife, is [from Calabria and wants to see Calabrian food on the menu]. But, you know, so I wanted this. So we start to work on one moment, like, very well, but again, with the food, it was kind of a challenge. And honestly, Kate, I don't know how. But one moment, we just like, start to have a call. And people come saying, "Michele, what we do this region?" They can do our own because it's part of the culture. They have the tradition there. So when they start to come here, and they start to taste [authentic dishes], everybody starts to get exciting. And for some reason, they start to do the opposite. They come and they always expect something different. And we start to work like crazy, crazy, crazy. And we've become like, pretty successful. In terms of number of customer, in terms of quality of customer, we have like some you say big shooter. And people that like every jab, a little bit the knowledge of Italian food. So the most common review was that like, was the true authentic Italian experience in terms of food, music and everything. So we start to work very, very, very well. Obviously, before the pandemic, and that's it. So like, from 60 seats, we average do like in the weekend under 30. Under 20, we flip to twice, three times the chair. And the people will create the kind of a little community with the new leather with the people they come they expect that I go to the[ir] table[s] every time to say something, to talk with someone. Personally, I think it is more professional than Italy. Not that in Italy we are not professional but like most of the time, work it's like, [you often inherit your] restaurant, And one moment you just say, "I take care of their business." Yeah, right. So they still don't have like, the, the mentality, like kind of this is a very business like a big industry, right?

Michele Pellegrini 19:19

So something different so I I have a feeling that the people they start to understand more the Italian food because I don't know like maybe no you, right? Because you have Italian background. Yeah, you can go in Italy. But the big problem was the people that [were] there wasn't Italian, right? So they have an idea of the Italian food, we'll just choose that one. [The customers] have a knowledge about Italian food more than some Italians that I know, right? They go in Italy, they travel, they watch the show.

Michele Pellegrini 23:42

Yes, yeah, they expect something different. And we are like, I think we arrived at the right moment in the right spot. So sometime I just say it's still a dream. But this is real happened.

Michele Pellegrini 25:01

So basically, like the idea was like to have like kind of incubation of three year with this restaurant and see how was the feedback. So the owner told me, we invest in your idea. We like and you run for us into three or we have a good feedback. And we see that the restaurant like the concept likes, and the people like the restaurant, we can continue to open a bigger location or eventually another one. And the things done well, pretty well. So just before the pandemic, we was almost close for takeover another restaurant in the city. So open the second location, but after like, you know, we signed the pre-contract, but after 10 days, they start the lockdown from them like it's "Oh, goodness, poor timing."

Michele Pellegrini 26:07

So a lot of people say that we have the best pizza in town. Oh, and I really think so. It's Napolitan pizza. So no, everybody likes completely. But who understand about pizza we understand about Napolitan pizza. We've planned they come from downtown.

Michele Pellegrini 26:33

From Mississauga from Oakville, and it comes with start to do some pizza and they actually very successful. So now we decided to do openers, more facility producer frozen pizza like in the quantity, no further. I don't know if you hear about the assembly. So and I was looking for

another location. I don't know when I don't know how to know what everything is match. But yes, the idea is to maybe open something in downtown one day.

Michele Pellegrini 27:19

That's exciting. I mean, hopefully after the summer, everything will be back to normal. And then maybe these plans can get resumed.

Michele Pellegrini 27:26

I will hope soon for the end of June. We will have like kind of normality.

Italian Canadian Foodways 27:35

A close second. Yep. That's all we can ask for I guess. Yeah. So are you just take-out right now?

Michele Pellegrini 27:46

Unfortunately, we we can only take-out. Also, we had the chance because it's pretty slow now to work about a lot of menu, a lot of new idea, new things. So we invest these five, six months to create something new or stay on top.

Michele Pellegrini 28:36

So what they notice is this one in this area (York), we have at least six or seven competitors very close with the same level of restaurant. And in general, we have an insane amount of competitors like basically all the old Italian restaurant. They are here, right? Yeah. So when we start, we start to have the owner from [various restaurants] so all the owner of the shop around here, they start to come for lunch you see what this guy like nobody know me like, and they say, "why this place is like so busy?" Like on Saturday night we average around 230 turn over people because we don't have room. Yeah, they say, "we've been [top restaurants] basically all our life," but they never changed the menu in thirty year. And after we open for six months, now they change. Yeah. Because like, obviously, the fact that every time you can look at the location is the same. But every time you come [to Giro D'Italia], you never have like the same food. So every, every time, there is a new experience and you compare with the restaurant around here, they don't change menu for 10 year. So they differ from us to change the way they do the things.

Michele Pellegrini 31:29

Yeah, honestly, that's an interesting idea. I really like it.

Michele Pellegrini 31:33

So was that change anything? Like it's a benefit for everybody? It was like, they stopped to do obviously they still do. They still do pasta with meatballs, alfredo, you start to see on the menu around here, like few things like interesting shooting new. And that's positive because like, I think like they realize after, you know, for me, they are like, super successful because if you have a restaurant involved for 20 years, and you're still solid, like I could, yeah, exactly my total respect, right. But in the same time, we have Domenic Primucci (of Pizza Nova) that came here to eat our food. So they start to come. We have the owner from the start to come and there was all shortlisting. So what's happening here we wasn't ready for like, you know, these like, and especially they see like, is not that I came like, with a bunch of money and I have a dream and I messed up. So like, they just say, Wow, this guy from [out of the] blue just put everybody in crisis. Right. So yeah, exactly. So this is why also why I think my own like you know, the honor that they have, they treat me very well because like I was like something that in a spat. So, again, I think it's part of who we are, like, you know, like a detailer. Like, I'd become friends with everybody. I don't get it. Yeah, you know, if you're a dishwasher for me, like you sit down, we're good. So I'd be like these vibes and also we have we have part of the staff that is not Italian, right? Now after three years, they just pick Italian and they sing Italian

song. So that they come here and they just say Ciao Metallica, like, you know, like they talk by sentence. But I love that. So there's something that made me proud Italian because not only the food, it's the fact that the people that work here completely match with the philosophy [of Giro D'Italia]. They don't come here just for the tips, work and that's it. They come here, but they listen to Italian song, they watch the Italian game.

Michele Pellegrini 35:10

I think you're like building an environment that is so inclusive of that culture that it's like everyone can be a part of it, which I think is nice, because obviously, there's like less immigration from Italy.

Michele Pellegrini 35:29

Yeah, I think that's awesome. I mean, I feel Wow, they just like made perfect what our project.

Michele Pellegrini 35:53

What's the future for your business? So obviously, we talked about probably that the frozen or the delivery service the second restaurant. Do you plan on changing the menu when lockdown is lifted?

Michele Pellegrini 36:14

So I want to start to say that definitely the last one year enough to hear I think they change a lot this industry, unfortunately. For a lot of reason, like you know they come up with these new idea that you receive the box with ingredient. The unique thing you cook out that something new someone or start to order for other stuff. I honestly think like it's impossible to live in a society that doesn't have restaurant, so like it's too much important for too much reason. import/export, for socializing, for the venue for like, memory for like a special day for whatever is the reason. It's impossible live without the restaurant, so I'm pretty positive that when the lockdown is over, I'm ready to bet that every single restaurant in GTA will be back. But also, I think, unfortunately, this pandemic made the kind of selection of what's like more original, more valuable, right. So obviously, people that have money and they used to go five times a week. The people that he is supposed to go twice a week and now they have to go only once a week, I personally think they they arrived at the point they say, "okay, you know what? instead to go out three time we go all in one. I want to go somewhere that like as I spend our special like, right so if during the week as Okay, I go one day a month or in one day God dollar one day, another place?" I don't know. Nowadays, we can go only once. I want to go a drink. Yeah, so I'm positive, that will be easy, and everybody will be busy. And also like, the restaurant that is still operating. I expect that what we're doing everybody doing, and they come up with the new idea, new menu. And it's also fourth because now the price of the material that we import from Italy, they are stupid, like they are like, out of control. Right? So you don't want to come here and sit down and spend \$50 for a plate of pasta, right? So this is mean that we necessarily need to back like what's happened in Italy 30 years ago, right? When the crisis start. People start to change the way they eat because maybe you start to eat like three times a week. You eat one or you start to try a more affordable [option]. Obviously now in Italy, we have this big tradition that if my dad doesn't eat the pasta once a day, my mom can start looking for a new house. And the thing is up in Canada. Here, obviously the situation is different, the economy's different, the price is different. But I start to have a feeling that the people they start to see, okay, you know, we need to do a selection. I don't know, maybe you go out five times a week. But now you say, "okay, you know what, I go once for the cinema, Cineplex and when I go on the club, yeah. Right. Because, until at least like, everybody back, I'm personally I still have my salary, but they kept my salary 80%." But, you know, again, the rent is the same, the car is the same, the formula, the income is less. So I don't know how everybody do. So we are ready for this, definitely. And I hope soon we have the chance to move in downtown, or wherever if it's not downtown. I told you, we was considering port credit, that personally, I really like the area we went to see this spot. It's an already another restaurant but are going bad. So we was

thinking to take over. And I think we were thinking but at the end is my owner, right? You want to they want to they want to develop the business. But they obviously consider me and every time they have to take a decision. They bring me a certificate. Yeah, I feel like it's part of my job. But it's also it's very nice when people with money and position and everything bet on me and they consider me so much.

Italian Canadian Foodways 43:03

I mean clearly if you started from a dishwasher to now opening almost a second location, you're doing something right. You're doing it right.

Michele Pellegrini 43:13

We try we try. Yeah. I think like I'm very very lucky only for one thing that I really love what it that's it? So for me, it's like it's frustrating. It's tiring. I went to university, I made master and alum because I want to become journalist right. But I am the the lucky to work with this big chef. And indeed, one day he told me immediately you can do whatever you want in your life. But trust me, it's rare to find someone in this industry that have like the sixth sense like you if you do this. You can do whatever you want after intermediate the way I'm going to be struggling to work like a journalist. And when I have like, maybe I give. So like we try, and I try that actually work well.

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