

Italian Canadian Foodways 30:15

Who is the founder of your business and when was it founded?

Steve Ferrin 30:20

Well, that's a tough question. Because the restaurant was there for 17 years before Gino and I--

Italian Canadian Foodways 30:27

That was presto right?

Steve Ferrin 30:28

--Yeah, but 2004, January of 2004, would be the the time that we took it over.

Italian Canadian Foodways 30:36

Okay, January. And so the founders would then be you and Gino Ferrin?

Steve Ferrin 30:45

Yes, the founders of the new company, which was Sostanza.

Italian Canadian Foodways 30:48

Yeah, perfect. What is your background? What city or region?

Steve Ferrin 30:55

Well, Scottish on my mother's side, Italian on my dad's side. So I refer to myself as an Italian because I'm an Italian. I'm an Italian and I'm from North Italy, Friulli, specifically. Rivignano and [town] are the two towns that my grandparents came from.

Italian Canadian Foodways 31:17

Perfect, okay. Did the food offerings you sold reflect your regional Italian heritage or your larger Italian heritage. So did it represent Friuli?

Steve Ferrin 31:28

I would say no, I would say that to it to a very small degree. The sausage that we offered was our recipe. It was our homemade recipe, which was different than what the people offered prior to. And we did have Luigi, the pizza guy, [who] would offer his kind of take on personal pizzas. And he made them I wouldn't say necessarily in a for your lung style. But he he made them the way he wanted. Yeah, but for overall, no, it was just basically what you would consider North American Italian food.

Steve Ferrin 32:10

Yeah, I mean, we talked about it for about a year and a half before we bought the place. We were looking at opening our own veal sandwich shop. That was it. And we drove around and we went to different builders and we were all over the place. And it became apparent that starting up your own place is a gigantic cost no matter how small it is even to start off of the old sandwich shop. So when this thing came open, it was actually [my friend] that used to go to Presto, and he said if you in June are still looking to, you know, be in the business, Presto is apparently for sale. It was him that got me to go over and talk to Joe, the owner, and his wife. WYeah, we met all the players and everybody. They're all the old Italians, it was great. It was a great old time there and she was a lovely lady.

Italian Canadian Foodways 33:11

What was the significance of the name, Sostanza?

Steve Ferrin 33:15

Well, my cousin Gino did not like the name Presto. And for me, I couldn't care less one way or the other didn't matter to me, Presto, you name it whatever you want. So we went on a, you know, a brainstorming session to try and figure out what's the name and we came up with all the standard ones. But then Gino came in one day and he said, "you know, my mom always used to say when when we were serving food, she would say eat some of this, it will give you some sostanza, [meaning] sustenance. He said that's what she would always say. "Eat some for some sostanza, eat it to sustain." And clearly, that's got to be the origin of the word. [I don't know] if it's even real or invented or whatever. So maybe the name itself has a Northern Italian [aspect] as that could be a dialect thing. But I have a suspicion that it almost--not even a suspicion but almost a memory--that Gino said it is from, you know, her particular part of the world and that word was something that they said

Italian Canadian Foodways 34:41

What was your original vision and/or mission for Sostanza?

Steve Ferrin 34:47

Right from the get-go, we wanted to have a market. We wanted something that would be similar to what we found in Florida [Mozarro's]. That was what we had in our head: not not just a restaurant, but to make it a marketplace.

Steve Ferrin 35:06

What was your best selling item? Well, sure wasn't pizza. I think everybody liked the sandwiches. The veal and the chicken sandwiches were known, the lasagna was good. And we changed those [from the last restaurant]. I mean, we didn't make it the way they did. We changed everything we bought. We actually bought veal for the veal sandwiches. But yeah, you know what, I forgot about the lasagna. I guess. Yeah. Yeah. Probably the lasagna [was the best selling item]. Yeah, you know, I think so. Okay, part of what we initially did, like we, we basically followed them, and then we made changes to all the food, but we didn't really change the, you know, like, Monday was, you know, big rigatoni or some pasta but everything else stayed like the meatballs, the veal, the chicken, that was there every day, but less daily specials.

Italian Canadian Foodways 36:03

What was the demographic of your customers at the beginning versus the end? Or was there much of a change?

Steve Ferrin 36:08

I would say it was the same from start to finish. And in age it was, it was an older age, I would say 35. And up was this 30, 35 and up was the standard age. We didn't get any of the newbies who wanted you know, salads. You weren't going there for any health food. But the main demographic were business people and pretty, pretty wealthy. You know?

Italian Canadian Foodways 36:43

So you mentioned that you guys bought good quality ingredients. Can you think of where you may have sourced them from?

Steve Ferrin 36:52

The meat came from Elmwood meats, which is not a cheap butcher. And he made the sausage to our recipe.

Italian Canadian Foodways 37:09

Is that around GTA or Mississauga?

Steve Ferrin 37:12

Port credit. We were sort of disgusted with the meat that they would bring us we for the first month. Let's say we were getting the meat from exactly the same suppliers that the old did. But when we looked at the meat, especially when we were looking at the veal was like this is [not good] and it was like I was wasting more time cutting [parts] out and it was just it was a nightmare. So we had Lee, the owner of Elmwood, come up to look at the operation, look at the size of the sandwiches that we wanted to make, so that he [could] provide us with the veal. This was a gigantic increase in cost. As for produce, we sourced that from Gordon Food Services (GFS).

Steve Ferrin 38:04

Every once in a while we would go across the street to Highland Farms if we wanted to do something that was [more unique]. Yeah, if we wanted to do something in the pizza department, or [Luigi] wanted to make pizza with asparagus on it or something like that, he'd go over there and get his his things in the morning. And then you know, but for the salad and onions and potatoes and everything, it was GFS.

Italian Canadian Foodways 38:25

And then was it solely family that worked there or was it mixed?

Steve Ferrin 38:30

There was a small mix. It was Gino, Chris, Luigi, and I. And then there were two women, Anna and a woman who was with the old owners and the other woman was a Greek woman who basically who maintained the customer-area of the restaurant. She lasted, I guess, she was there for about two years. And then it became obvious that having her there was a little redundant since we had Chris. And [my sister and my cousin].

Italian Canadian Foodways 39:46

The rest of my questions [revolve around the pandemic].

Steve Ferrin 39:48

Well, I can say this, that obviously I wouldn't know but I would say I've had conversations with Gino, over the course of last year, and we both agreed. We would have lasted a month. Yeah, we would have been done. Yeah. Because we were basically. Well, we said three months. I think we could have held on for a 90 day window. Yeah. I can't think of anything else. I mean, there'd be a lot more to say if we were still in the business. It's been so long. I mean, it was 16, 15 years, 14 years ago.

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