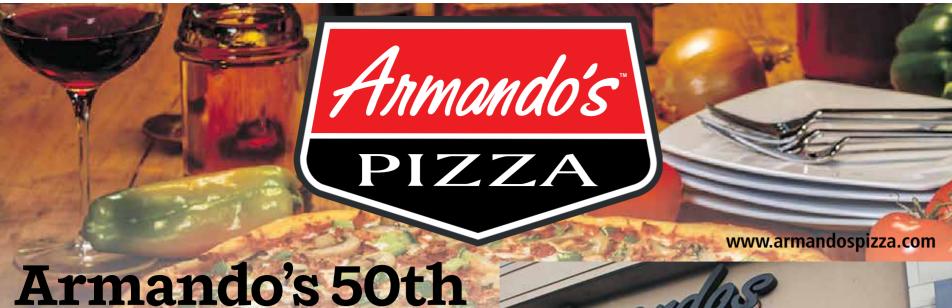
Anniversary



Award-winning pizzeria celebrates milestone year

BY REBECCA WRIGHT

At age 26, Armando Gerardi had a dream of opening his own pizza business, and so he did—in a building on Walker Road with a small restaurant space in the front and tiny apartment on the

It was 1967 and Gerardi was running a one-man show; he served customers in his six-table dining room, answered the phone for takeout orders and cooked the pizzas in the kitchen. His wife, Antonia, would help him when for your next catering wasn't enough space," Antonia she got home in the evenings from her day job as a beautician.

Fast-forward 50 years and that humble business is now part of the parking lot of one local legacy that many know and love—Ar-

"It's been a lot of hard work," says Armando. "I didn't see it going this far."

Pride is what comes to mind when thinking about how Armando's has grown and expanded over the years, says Antonia. "We were two young kids with no money,

ing to start a business," she recalls. "But now, it's everywhere, and it's a really beautiful thing. We're truly thankful to our customers store. for really supporting us over the years."

The pair lived in the attached apartment and raised their three children there. Antonia recalls her middle son, Andre, per-

fecting his pizza-making skills at age 12 alongside his dad in the kitchen, and declaring to his siblings at that young age that the business would one day be his.

And now it is—along with his business partner and brother-in-law, John Pizzo. While the two next-generation family mem-

bers are the current owners of the business, original owners and founders Antonia and Armando are never far away and

"This business is our life," says Antonia. "It's nice to keep it in

still often help run things.

Antonia says their current Walker Road location was opened 11 years after they started

"I cried when that little place closed because it was really nice, but we outgrew it —there just

Pizzo opened the second corporate location with his wife Josie-Armando's daughfor four years—which is where he met his things.

And that was just the start.

wife, who answered phones there. cilitate expansion across Essex County.

"For us to do that on our own would be virtually impossible. You need an owner at each site," says Pizzo, adding that their Tecumseh location was the first franchised

Currently, amongst the corporate and franchise stores, the Armando's brand em-

ploy's 400 full and part time employees.



the family and pass it on to the Antonia and Armando Gerardi started Armando's Pizza 50 years ago.

option for customers to order Armando's to and always use the best quality ingredients." share with others—whether it is for a special

"It's a big part of our business and it's "Armando's has become synonymous with one of the ways we've evolved over the not only great pizza but also delicious wholeyears," says John, adding that they have very equipped facilities to streamline the catering ness has been using local Galati cheese for process, like their new state-of-the-art commore than 40 years. "We've kept with them missary kitchen on Cabana Road.

success has been to stay true to their roots, modified milk like many cheeses.' of the 12 locations their business became—a ter—in South Windsor in 1996. That was says Andre, something he and Pizzo have after he worked at the Walker Road location continued from his parents' way of running Armando's offers a full gourmet menu with

> As the business continued to grow and be- Antonia about her husband's special recipe trends, which is why they offer gluten-free come more successful, Andre and Pizzo soon —something they've kept the same over the realized franchising was the best way to fa- years. "We've never cheapened our product CONTINUED ON B9

Armando says he still continues to make occasion, social gathering or business event his unique blend of spices for the business's sauces about once a month.

some food," says Andre, citing how the busibecause it's important to us that it's 100 per Over the years, one of their secrets to cent pure milk cheese, not cut with soy or

And while pizza has always been the draw, many pasta and meat dishes. And they're "His pizza has always been perfect," says continually looking to tap into current



Armando's Pizza restaurant at 3202 Walker Road

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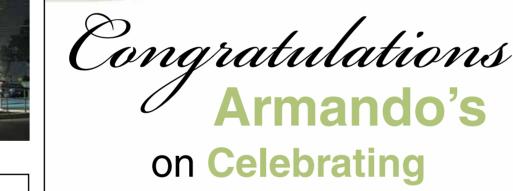


The Salamina team has enjoyed working closely with you and congratulates you on this milestone achievement.

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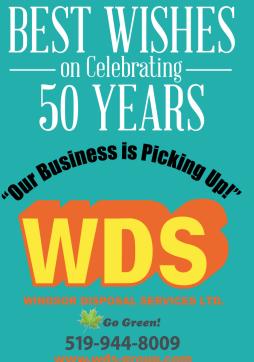
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CONTINUED FROM B8

options and are looking to expand their menu to include vegan var-

"And we like to take it to the next level—so we're looking for the best "Like take gluten free, for instance, ogy, even equip- employees and franchisees petitors from all the it because it actually tastes really good, not just for the health bene-

Dean Litster and president of our customers can place an order operations Larry Vallieres—are right from their smart phone." continually looking to evolve the brand and business. They attend

conventions regularly, whether it is slow down, say Pizzo and Andre. to learn about a new pizza-making

"We are continually experiism and Hospitality Award, and lifeblood of any business and they menting and searching for new Armando's would also like pizza competition in of these new trends," says Andre. products, technol- to extend thanks to their Las Vegas with com-

we want it to be that you're eating ment to make us for contibuting to the many world, our pizza won more efficient and years of success. experience for the customer," says 3rd best pizza over all," says Andre. Andre and Pizzo-along with Andre. "We are currently working

> Armando's is an award-winning at the Cabana Road location. business, and they have no plans to

"Our awards include the People's method or ingredient, or ways to Choice Award for Best Pizza and

improve the customer experience. the Chamber of Commerce's Tourin an international

Pizzo is proud that the next their head corporate pizza chef, on an iOS and Android app that generation has already become involved in the family business—with his two teenage sons making pizzas

1st place in the 'trad-

"And in the New Year, Armando's

is headed in an exciting new direction and tapping into a new market," Pizzo adds.

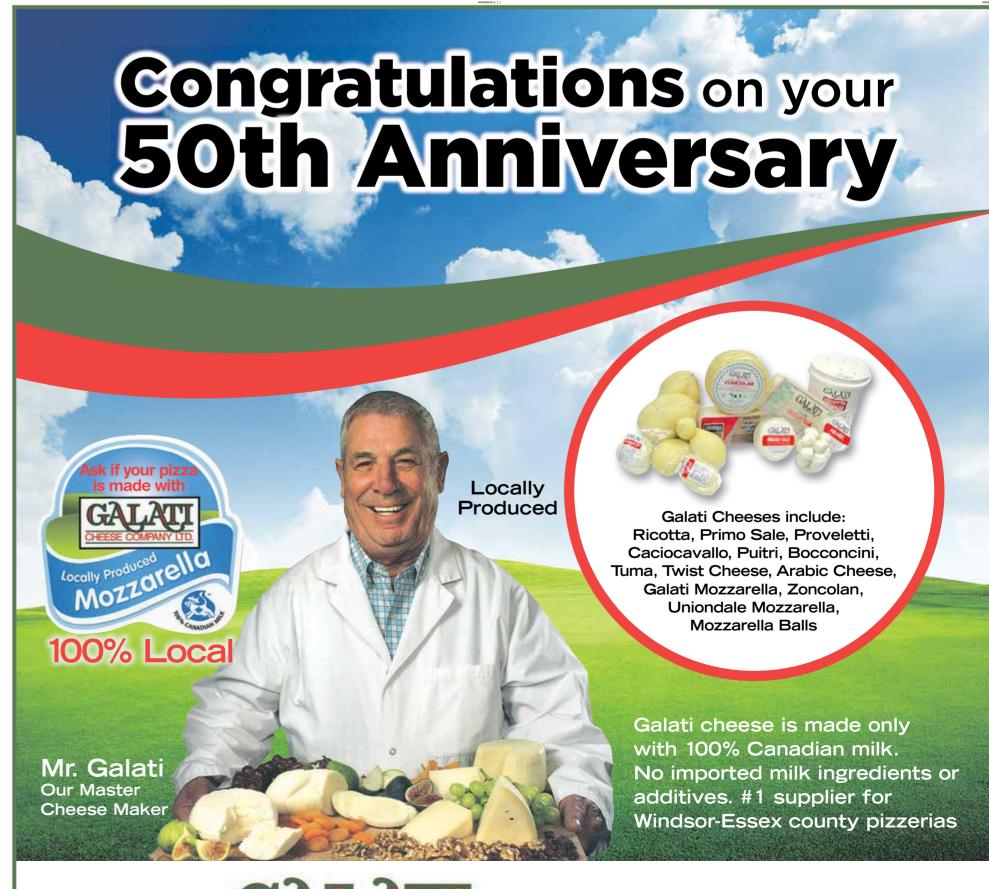
Andre says customers are the are grateful to have been fortunate enough to serve the Windsor and surrounding communities for all

these years. "Our business focus is all about the customer and we've always been about providing the highest quality of ingredients, at a fair price, with the best possible service. We don't skimp. It's that simple," says Andre. "These are values that my parents instilled from day one, and it's still our motto 50 years



Armando Gerardi appears in a Wind sor Star ad from 1970.





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