

Johnny Sortino's Pizza Has the Right Recipe for Success

For more than three generations, Omaha pizza lovers have been enjoying Johnny Sortino's Pizza after hockey games, soccer matches, youth baseball and basketball tournaments, for birthday parties and just about every other occasion imaginable.

From its original address at 72nd and Pacific Streets, to its current location at 7880 L St., Johnny Sortino's Pizza has been owned and operated by the same family in much the same way its founder did when he opened the restaurant in the late 1960s.

"The business was started in 1965 as a fruit and vegetable market by my father and one of his brothers," recalled Sheri Taylor, president and owner of the restaurant. "A couple years later they started making pizzas and when that business took off, the market was closed. Eventually



Dana (left), Sheri Taylor (right) and their daughter, Lindsey, represent the second and third generations of Sortino family members who have worked at the restaurant.

Johnny bought out his brother leaving my parents as owners."

When the restaurant operation passed from father to Sheri and husband, Dana Taylor, the original recipes and business model remained as they did under Johnny Sortino.

"The concept is still the same," Sheri acknowledged. "You place your order at the front counter and in 15 to 20 minutes your pizza is ready to enjoy. People know what they can expect when they come in."

Maintaining the quantity, quality and selection of pizza toppings,

pasta dishes, and homemade onion rings over the years has kept people coming back from one generation to the next. "We have never cut corners," Dana explained. "Nothing is frozen. Nothing is pre-made. It's all made to order from scratch. Our food costs are higher than our competitors because we have to live up to the standard Johnny started."

The restaurant's specialty pizzas include Johnny's Surprise with four vegetables and two meat toppings, and the Hockey Players Special with sausage, mushrooms, pepperoni and extra cheese. "Over the years,

the Hockey Players Special has become especially popular with fans and players with the Omaha Knights, Lancers and UNO Maverick hockey teams," Sheri noted.

Sortino's Pizza has also been a favorite of baseball teams like Louisiana State University, Texas University and Cal Fullerton while competing in Omaha for the College World Series, as well as youth sports teams and family parties.

Over the years, the owners have made improvements to the kitchen, including a two-tier oven capable of cooking 24 large pizzas in eight minutes. The expanded dining area includes a video game room, several flat screen TVs and seating for 420 people, which isn't unusual for a weekend crowd. "It makes it nice because a group of 15 to 40 people can come in without a reservation and somehow we always find a way to get them seated," Dana observed.

The owners began their business relationship with First National Bank after becoming frustrated with the hidden fees they were being charged by their previous bank. "The move to First National went very smoothly," Sheri recalled. "Our business banker made it easy, managing all of the paperwork for us."

Today, the Taylors enjoy banking with First National and its employees. "The people there are friendly. Everybody knows us." Sheri added.



Johnny Sortino's iconic marquee has attracted customers for decades.



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