



ANGIE'S PIZZA

MAKING FRIENDS FOR 55 YEARS

By Lucas Leigh PMQ Staff

Quick Fact:
Angie's Pizza is celebrating its 55th Anniversary. Pizza Hut is only 49 years old.

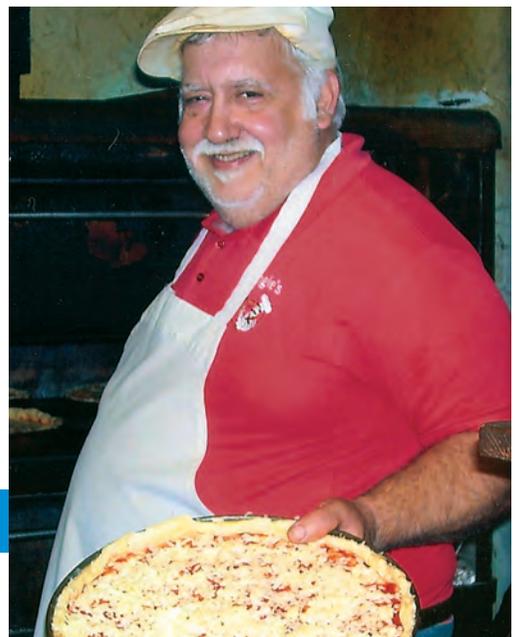
For 55 years, the DeFazio's have operated Angie's Pizza in Dickson City, Pennsylvania—and pizza's all they do. The original owner, Robert Sr., hurt himself working in the coal mines, and he and his wife, Angie, decided to get into the pizza business. "It's still the same pizza pie that was made 55 years ago," Bob DeFazio, head pizza maker and co-owner said of his brilliantly old-fashioned pies. Known for taking his time in the kitchen just to customize a patron's order, Bob has been making the pizzas full-time at Angie's for 20 years and was an executive chef for 14 years before he became a pizza man. As a celebration for their 55th anniversary, and for being one of the oldest restaurants in their area, Angie's Pizza held a customer appreciation night for some of their most loyal customers. They also gained some free publicity in their local newspaper, which helped stir up some new business, as well as bringing back some of the customers that had their first date at Angie's over 40 years ago.

CUSTOMER APPRECIATION

Bob explained how the night worked, "We sent invitations out to our most loyal customers or handed them out in the restaurant as they came in. I prepared an Italian buffet with homemade meatballs, porketta (a local delicacy made of

roasted fresh ham, seasoned with garlic and dill), and all the trimmings, and we had pizza for half price that day and quarter drafts of beer also." Bob said the customers really appreciated the great deals, stating that they narrowed down the invitation list to just their best customers. "My wife Marion handwrote the invitations, and since this was a special night, we didn't want just anybody coming in simply because it was a good deal," he affirmed.

Bob DeFazio in the oven room getting ready to put a dressed pie into the oven.



A picture of Bob Sr. and Angie DeFazio in 1951 in their newly opened restaurant, Angie's Pizza.

"My wife wrote to the newspaper and made an announcement, basically just that we'd been open for 55 years and just letting people know we're still around," Bob said. "When the paper got interested in the story, they decided to interview us and put a profile in the paper. When people read the history of the place, a lot of them that used to eat our pizza decided to come over because they hadn't been in for a long time." The ad Angie's paid for, which cost around \$150, ran on Memorial Day weekend. Bob said that was normally a slower weekend because of the festivities in town, but that the ad worked really well and he saw an increase instead of a decrease for the next few weeks. "The local fair usually draws away from our business, but we actually saw about a 25 percent increase for three weeks or so after the ad. When we had the publicity, we were getting people from a 20 to 25-mile radius, and just thinking about how many pizza places are in between here and there, that's a pretty good feat," Bob admitted. Marion said many of the new customers who tried Angie's Pizza after the ad was placed are now loyal customers who come in almost every week.

THE BUSINESS OF ANGIE'S PIZZA

Angie's has decided to do what they do best—pizza. "We don't have delivery, so the thing that hurts our business the most is cold weather. I've been thinking about putting some other items on the menu, such as sandwiches and salads, but I'm just not as hungry for money as I was in the past—I'm pretty happy with the way things are," he said. "I make our sausage for the pizza, and that's our biggest seller. I try to keep it simple and keep the quality good. I've seen a lot of changes over the years, such as adding wings and other items. I've seen them come and seen them go, the other places, and people come in and say, 'I've tried that pizza and it's lousy.' It's still the same pizza pie that we made 55 years ago. One of the key ingredients is our old Blodgett oven. I start our pizza out in a tin and then I flip it onto the brick and it gets the crust

crispy. I don't think the chains take their time to individualize each order—it's just not as personable."

"We just do sausage, pepperoni, broccoli, anchovies, olives, peppers, mushrooms, onions, and sweet peppers. These other places go off the wall with all kinds of ingredients and toppings, I



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The DeFazio family gets ready for the Angie's Pizza 55th Anniversary celebration, which was held in May of 2006. Left to right: Maria, Bob, Marion, Dominick, and Blaise.

know out on the West Coast they have pineapple and ham, and all this other stuff. To me, that's not pizza," Bob said. So what is pizza? "To me, pizza is basically cheese and sauce. When they start putting on all this off-the-wall stuff, they're not making it good." Bob encourages pizza-makers to stick to the basics, and don't scrounge. "I could make an extra buck if I scrounged a little more, but I think that's one of the main reasons people come back. I get \$9 for a 14-inch tray of pizza, and \$2 more for each topping. To me, I think it's reasonable, but not cheap either. I like to generously cover the cheese with toppings so you can't even see it." Bob also said Angie's has take-home menus available. "I no-

ticed people became more adventurous in a sense when we started offering the take-home menus. They will try something a little different when they see all the options in front of them," he said.

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

"When my mom was alive, she was great, but very controlling." Bob said they revamped the restaurant last year, adding central air conditioning. "That increased business a lot because nobody wants to come into a place to eat when it's hot. After she passed away, we were able to fix the place up more, add some more toppings, and run it the way we wanted to," Bob admitted. During the week, Angie's is staffed by Bob in the

kitchen, and Marion in the front. On Fridays, their busiest night, they get some help from the family with their niece and nephew Danielle and Joshua Burge helping out, and also their godchild, Beth Scochin, who waits on customers in the dining room. Although Fridays are their busiest nights, Bob said they're even busier during Lent because of the strict rules with eating certain kinds of food. "Since people can't eat meat on Fridays during Lent, they will come in and order a pizza, so we see a lot of business during that time." Over the years, their children, Dominick, Blaise, and Maria, all worked in the restaurant. Now they're on their own, but they help out whenever they come home to visit. "We hope that one of them will eventually run the business," Marion said.

WORDS OF ADVICE

We've heard some great advice to keeping it simple, high quality, and keeping customers happy. Angie's Pizza has served several generations and to this day is still serving some of those same customers that first came there in the Fifties on their first date. Some words of advice from Bob, "Consistency is key to keeping our brand alive. We use quality ingredients and try not to cut corners at all. We personalize orders just to our customers' liking—if they want the crust a little burned, I'll make it that way—and although it may take a little longer, that's the reason we have the chains beat on quality." Angie's also wins in the age sector—Pizza Hut didn't open their first store until 1958.

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