



Margherita pizza with basil, fresh mozzarella and tomatoes is just one of two dozen specialty pizzas offered.

Italian *plus* Imagination

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photographs by ED BURKE

Village Pizzeria thrives in Galway



Espresso and biscotti

In between taking phone calls and welcoming customers to her restaurant, Sandy Foster breezes through the dining room of Village Pizzeria and Ristorante, on her way to check on an order of caramelizing fennel — a personal recommendation she made to a customer on a low-carb eating plan.

But, as often happens, Foster gets sidetracked.

“How’s the pizza, Helen?” she asks, stopping at a table where a couple of regulars are halfway through a Philly Cheese Steak pie.

After a brief check of the bustling kitchen, she’s back in the dining room, chatting with customers and gauging how the caramelized fennel went over with the low-carb diner (for the record, it was a hit).

In the kitchen is Foster’s long-time partner Joe Guerrero, who is busy crafting pizza dough for orders that pile in from diners and the restaurant’s substantial take-out trade.



Joseph Guerrera and partner Sandy Foster and Sandy's daughter, Jessica Mancinone, at Village Pizzeria and Ristorante in Galway.

Pizzas and entrees to go have become so popular over the years that four parking spaces in front of the restaurant are reserved for take-out.

Even in the winter, business is brisk at the restaurant, located on Route 29 in Galway, 12 miles west of Saratoga Springs and halfway to Amsterdam.

"During winter, we primarily get locals, but the area has really grown," Foster says. "There are a lot of second-home owners here now."

In the summer, the crowds nearly double, but, fortunately, so does the dining space, thanks to the al fresco patio out back, which Foster decorated like a Tuscan garden with colorful flowers and thatches of rosemary, basil and oregano. As a finishing touch, she added a waterfall and pond with koi fish and a Bocce court.

Foster laughs when she thinks back to how it all began more than two decades ago with a group of

hungry snowmobilers.

"I always had dough rising in my kitchen because you couldn't get pizza out here 20 years ago," she remembers. "On weekends, when friends would stop

by after snowmobiling, I'd serve pizza. After a while they said, 'Gee, you should open a pizzeria.'" Being a restaurateur was nothing she ever planned on, but when the former Glendale Inn became available for sale, everything changed.

"I went in to take a look, and the rest is history," she said.

So is Village Pizzeria's original menu.

The pizza and calzone selections of 20 years ago

have evolved to reflect the couple's passion for northern Italian cuisine.

A quick look through the laundry list of salads, entrees and desserts makes clear that Foster's imagination doesn't have an "off" button.

Salads include Pear Gorgonzola with ►



Shrimp Peppadew



Artichoke heart, broccoli and tomato pizza



Italian pastries



Pear Gorgonzola salad



Village Pizzeria and Ristorante on Route 29 in Galway is about 15 miles west of Saratoga Springs.

caramelized pears, walnuts and Gorgonzola over field greens; Ahi Tuna Salad drizzled with cusabi dressing and fresh ginger; and the Ponte Vecchio, an overflowing platter of greens, black olives, roasted red peppers, tomatoes, slices of prosciutto and fresh mozzarella, which is made in-house.

There are lists of beef, fish, chicken and pasta entrees, all bearing Foster's creative touch, such as Pork Ossobucco, Sirloin Horseradish Focaccia, Clams Basilica (Vognole clams sautéed with cherry tomatoes, basil and extra virgin olive oil over fettuccine), Fettuccine Carciofini (artichoke hearts, mushrooms and sun-dried tomatoes in a light brandy cream sauce over fettuccine), and Shrimp Peppadew (sautéed with asparagus, Prosecco and Peppadew peppers from South Africa served with Risotto).

Vegetarian selections include meatless pasta dishes, as well as vegetable specialties such as Eggplant Rollatini, Sautéed Broccoli, Sautéed Artichoke Hearts, a Beet Napoleon layered with goat cheese and Portabella Mushroom Pie.

"Some people think that Italian food is all pasta and bread, but it's really quite

Village Pizzeria & Ristorante

- ◆ Where: 2727 Route 29 in East Galway
- ◆ Hours: Lunch and dinner served Wednesday through Monday. Beginning Memorial Day weekend, the restaurant is open daily, but on Mondays and Tuesdays, it does not open until 4 p.m.
- ◆ More information and to order gift baskets: Call 882-9431 or visit www.villagepizzeria.com

healthy," she says. "The Italians have a beautiful lifestyle."

Foster was sure to include classics such as lasagne, manicotti, eggplant parmigiana and veal picatta.

"My passion for food has made the menu what it is," she says. "People ask me how I come up with new dishes. I just go into the kitchen and put different things together."

But perhaps nowhere is Foster more creative than with the list of two dozen varieties of pizza on the menu. Over the years, she has surged past the pepperoni and sausage boundaries to create mouthwatering combinations like pesto and shrimp, lobster tail meat, and buffalo wing pizza with such bite you may want to order a side of bleu cheese dressing.

One thing she'll never change: the Grande premium mozzarella used in the pizza, stromboli and calzones. "It's higher quality than other commercial mozzarellas and always consistent," she says.

Sandy and Joe take regular research trips to Italy to tour restaurants and vineyards for the up-and-coming trends. Village Pizzeria and Ristorante's wine list now tops 200 varieties from Sonoma to Umbria.

"We try to locate interesting wines, and those varieties that are in thematic harmony with our cuisine," she says. "Each year, we bring back a little bit of Italy with us and it's why people feel the way they do when they come here."

Foster isn't just talking about the food. The terra cotta walls in the restaurant are reminiscent of a Tuscan villa with framed pictures of old family photos, the Coliseum, Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, and Etruscan-Relief figures. Mixed in with the décor are framed headshots from the cast of "The Sopranos." James Gandolfini raves that they have "the best pizza in Saratoga," while Edie Falco endorses the sauce.

Over the years, so many customers swooned over Foster's marinara, she decided to bottle five tomato sauce recipes and began a second business, Sausations Gift Baskets, run by her daughter, Jessica Mancinone.

Jessica creates theme gift baskets that incorporate her mother's jars of marinara, filetto di pomodoro, vodka, fra diavolo and pizza sauces.

"We get a lot of corporate business and ship all over the country," says Jessica, pointing out a cellophane-wrapped basket filled with sauce,

Penne Toscano

What you'll need:

1 lb whole wheat pasta
1 bulb of fennel sliced
15 cherry tomatoes (about one carton)
1 lb spinach
1/2 cup goat cheese
1 tsp. chopped garlic
1/2 cup white wine
1/4 cup olive oil
dash of salt
pinch of black pepper

How to prepare:

To roast fennel, place slices on cookie sheet, and drizzle with olive oil, salt and pepper.

Cover with aluminum foil, and roast at 375 degrees for 20 minutes.

Boil water for pasta. In a sautee pan, heat olive oil. Add garlic once caramelized, and add spinach.

Then add roasted fennel. Let spinach wilt, and add goat cheese, white wine and cherry tomatoes. Add cooked penne to pan and toss. Serve.

provided by Sandy Foster of The Village Pizzeria and Ristorante



infused olive oil, balsamic vinegar and marinated antipasto.

Because Sandy is a breast cancer survivor, mother and daughter decided to donate part of the proceeds to the Susan G. Komen Foundation. The sauce is sold on the restaurant's Web site, at two downtown Saratoga Springs locations — Four Seasons and Saratoga Salsa — and throughout New England.

Sandy and Jessica have wine and beer tastings throughout the year to raise money for Avon's Breast Cancer Walk in New York City every October, which they both participate in. Scheduled fundraisers this year are a May 15 beer

tasting and June 19, July 28, Aug. 19, and Sept. 18 wine tastings.

During July 4 weekend, The Village Pizzeria will celebrate its 20th year in operation. Joe and Sandy plan to celebrate a week after the fact. "We're already booked for parties that weekend," she says with a laugh. "Our event book fills up pretty fast nowadays."

She doesn't mind a bit.

"I love everything about having a restaurant. There's something about it that keeps you young; there's always something to learn," Foster says. "If it's a passion in your heart, it's easy." 