



**STANISLAUS**  
**FOOD PRODUCTS**  
 P.O. Box 3951  
 Modesto, CA 95352  
 (800) 328-8667



PRSR STD  
 U.S. POSTAGE  
 PAID  
 PERMIT 10  
 MODESTO, CA

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

© 2023

STANISLAUS FOOD PRODUCTS ©



NOVEMBER 2023 P.O. Box 3951, MODESTO, CALIFORNIA 95352 (800) 328-8667

*Sharing Success: Thoughts from Tom Cortopassi*



**“High School Movie Tickets”**

Maureen and I recently enjoyed a nice dinner out together before an evening at the movies. Perhaps because of Covid, it had been quite a while since we had visited a theater.

Paying for our tickets, the prices seemed a bit higher than what I expected. They were certainly **much** higher than the \$4 I remember paying back in high school.

Then it hit me. I was comparing “Apples to Oranges.”

Back in high school, a theater ticket may have cost \$4, but my first “real” job (besides working on our family’s farm) paid \$4.50 per hour. Back then, my “starter job” **earned me enough per hour to buy one movie ticket, with just a little left over.**

Today in our area, **a young person with the same type of “starter job” still earns about enough per hour to buy a movie ticket (at today’s prices) with a bit left over.**

Of course, this doesn’t work for everything. For example, automobile fuel has certainly risen faster than average.

But on average, if you measure consumers’ wages in terms of **“what you can buy”** for an hour’s worth of work, the cost of many goods, including restaurant meals, have remained equally reasonable over time.

**I feel that this offers an important business lesson regarding inflation.** As business owners, the reason that cost-inflation is so frustrating is that it messes with our perception of “what things should cost” vs. what **value** they provide.

In our heads, our perception of **“what things should cost”** is based on **past experience**. (This is especially true when we were younger and had barely enough money to make ends meet, which caused us to pay closer attention to prices.) Like a \$4 movie ticket, if it has been a while since we paid close attention to the cost of a particular item or service, we tend to best remember what it cost “back then” versus the reality of what it costs now.

As owners, we especially **HATE** raising our prices, even when necessary to keep pace with rising costs. Our natural concern is customer affordability at the new price point. But the reality over time is that, as the cost of many things gradually increases, **average wages also tend to inch upward.**

Based on my experience interacting with restaurateurs, I believe that restaurant food, particularly pizza and Italian

food, remains highly affordable when compared “Apples to Apples” to what the average consumer can buy with an hour’s worth of wages.

To test this idea, I asked La Trattoria editor, Steve Rouse, to reach out to a several of our pizzeria customers and request printed menus from ten to twelve years ago. (Thankfully, many of them keep great records!) They also shared their current menu prices, which all had been raised within the past year.

I then asked Steve to compare their “back then” menu price for a premium large pizza versus government stats for average hourly wages earned by American consumers that year. Steve then repeated the comparison using their current menu prices and current government stats for hourly earnings.

Our sample was admittedly small. But when measured in “how much premium pizza can consumers afford with an hour’s wages,” even after recently increasing their menu prices, these successful pizzerias **remain as equally affordable today as they were ten years ago!**

Here is my point. In business, pricing decisions are highly personal, and as owners we often rely on “gut instinct” to help guide them. However, just like my \$4 high school movie tickets, always remember that our gut feelings about “what things should cost” were most likely formed back when money was tighter, and we paid much closer attention to prices.

Assuming that you are confident in the superior quality of your offerings, feel equally confident in charging what they are worth!

A few things are for certain. While cost-inflation is frustrating, the great news is that consumers **still LOVE** great-tasting restaurant food, and great-tasting restaurant food has **remained** exceptionally affordable!

On a personal note, Maureen and I wish you the best during the coming holidays and hope you enjoy special time together with your loved ones!

Until next time,  
 Ciao!

*Tom Cortopassi*

Tom Cortopassi, President and Co-Owner



**BUSINESS BUILDERS: REMAINING VIBRANT**

**Frequent Freshening**

To better stand out from other quality independents, Luca Iovine wanted to keep his decade-old pizzeria feeling fresh and contemporary over time, without losing its traditional vintage vibe.

When Luca first took over a previously occupied pizzeria location, he loved its brick walls and vintage vibe. To overcome the unfortunate reputation of the prior business, Luca needed to immediately make everything feel visually cleaner and cheerier. The emotional impact of brightly repainting the entire interior was so dramatic, **Luca decided to update his interior paint colors and rehang different pictures every two years to keep his business always feeling fresh and vibrant.**



KEY IDEA!

**Vintage Mascots**

To help give his place a playful vintage personality, **Luca also worked with a graphic artist to design illustrated character “mascots” to feature in his logo, team shirts, and customer swag.** Through different

illustrations over time, his ads and swag have shown the mascots engaging in football and other fun seasonal activities! Not only do customers quickly snap up his mascot “merch,” Luca’s youthful staff likes that their t-shirt uniforms project the kind of playful, hip vibe

that they or their friends might choose for their own off-the-job wardrobe!

As a result, Gianni’s Pizza continues to feel warmly familiar, yet fresh and youthful over time!

Luca Iovine, Owner  
 Gianni’s Pizza  
 Richboro, PA



Share your proven business-building tips and **if we publish your idea, we’ll send you \$100!** Your tip can deal with any aspect of your business as long as it has added to your success. While we would like to give you credit, we will respect your wishes to remain anonymous if you prefer.

IDEA EXCHANGE FOR INDEPENDENT RESTAURATEURS

# SUCCESS STORY:

## GROCERIA MERANTE, PITTSBURGH, PA

For more than 45 years, *Groceria Merante* has kept Pittsburgh, PA, locals supplied with premium cut-to-order deli meats and cheeses, hard-to-find imported groceries, specialty hand-packed ice creams, unique whole bean coffees, as well as hot Italian entrees to go.

Owner Filomena Merante says that the 2nd and 3rd generation Italian-American families who originally settled in the neighborhood regularly return from the suburbs for a taste of their favorite foods and to stock up on traditional staples, especially during the holidays.

Besides cooking her Italian entrees with only premium quality ingredients, Filomena credits the enduring success of the family's cozy 900 square foot shop to her staff's focus on making every customer's visit an upbeat, welcoming experience.

Even if they are busy helping someone else, her tight-knit staff makes a point of establishing eye contact and warmly greeting each arriving customer within seconds of entering the store.

The team also doesn't automatically assume that each guest knows what they want. Instead, they take a consultive sales approach by asking whether the customer has something in mind or if they are looking for something new to try.

Filomena's 22-year-old son Francesco Lies, who began stocking shelves at age 4, says their key to building customer loyalty is working to reinforce a personal connection with every guest on every visit.

Getting to know as many regulars' names as possible is another goal he learned from his mother. As a third-generation leader in the family business, Francesco encourages their team to genuinely ask every customer how their day is going. By consciously working to project an upbeat, positive vibe to each guest, his team helps further elevate customer mood during their visit.

Francesco is finding that younger college-age students are particularly curious about various Italian foods, asking him questions like "How would you recommend using pesto?" In fact, he actively encourages their questions, figuring that if they feel comfortable in their curiosity, they will likely keep coming back.

Generation after generation, making each customer feel recognized and appreciated has kept this family business an ongoing success!



### Visit Our Business-Building Library Online!

Visit our *Restaurateur Only* website for information about our company and products, family recipes, plus *multiple issues of La Trattoria!*

[www.stanislaus.com](http://www.stanislaus.com)



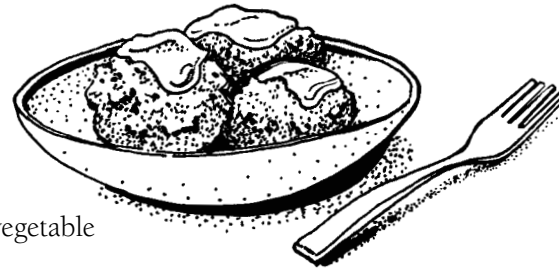
# LA VERA CUCINA:

## NANA JOSEPHINE'S SFINGE

For Kansas City restaurateur Jasper Mirabile, the aroma of hot sfinge (sven-jay) or fried Sicilian doughnuts vividly reminds him of his childhood, sitting on his Nana Josephine's kitchen counter while she made him this traditional treat. While some versions of sfinge are ricotta-filled, Nana Josephine's version is enjoyed plain, with a dusting of sugar and honey. Jasper warns that these puffy pastries are addictive!

### Ingredients:

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup all purpose flour
- dash of salt
- 1 heaping tablespoon vegetable shortening
- 3 eggs
- 4-5 cups Fall Harvest olive oil
- 3 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
- 3 tablespoons honey

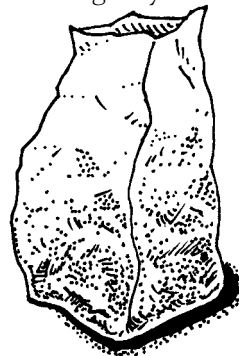


### Instructions:

Bring water to a boil in a medium saucepan over high heat. When water is boiling, remove pan from heat and add flour, salt, and shortening. Beat well with a fork. Beat in the eggs one at a time.

Add olive oil to a deep saucepan (oil depth should be about 2"). Heat oil to 350°F. For each sfinge, spoon 1 tablespoon batter into the hot oil. To avoid crowding the pan, fry sfinge three to five at a time until golden brown on each side, about 4-5 minutes. Drain on paper towels.

Place finished sfinge and confectioners' sugar in a brown lunch sack. Shake gently until sfinge are coated with sugar. Serve sfinge warm, in a dish, drizzled with honey!

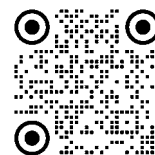


### About Sfinge

Similar to *zeppole*, sfinge are fritters or doughnuts made from unleavened dough. According to restaurateur Jasper Mirabile, sfinge first gained popularity in Palermo's outdoor market called *La Vucciria* (la vu-cheria). Today, street vendors there still sell them by the dozen in little brown paper sacks!

**LA TRATTORIA**

"Scan to Follow Us on Social"



# KEY IDEAS:

## LONG-TERM THINKING

### Unconditional Satisfaction

In his highly successful 53-year career, fine dining restaurateur Giovanni Galati says his secret to retaining loyal repeat customers over many years (and thousands of dollars of purchases) is unconditionally guaranteeing their **complete satisfaction** with their meal, period.



So whenever a guest doesn't appear to care for a dish (even when they don't complain and even when the meal was perfectly prepared), Giovanni's servers immediately offer to replace it with something else of the guest's choosing. They also politely explain that they have comped the disliked item and the replacement if accepted. This additional "generosity" helps guests feel valued and removes any lingering dissatisfaction that could keep them from eagerly returning next time.

Unconditionally guaranteeing satisfaction (not just quality), along with providing consistently superior food, has helped keep Giovanni's high-end clientele fiercely loyal and reinforced his Word of Mouth reputation for excellence.

Giovanni Galati, Owner  
*Dominic's on the Hill*  
St. Louis, MO

### Boosting Job Appeal

In opening his own place, Adam DiLauro questioned why restaurant industry turnover is so high. As a former sous-chef working for others, Adam believed that, especially for family breadwinners, uncertain work schedules, 6-7 days away from family, late nights, and not being able to count on a full forty-hour paycheck often made "9 to 5" jobs in other industries seem more attractive.

So Adam designed his operations around giving his cooks a dependable 4 day x 10 hour work week (and paycheck) with 3 fixed "off" days including a Saturday or Sunday. He also set business hours to close by 9 PM so employees could see spouses and put kids to bed nightly. As a result, during his first three years in business, Adam has retained his entire kitchen crew!

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Maria	X		X		X	X	
Tony		X		X	X		X
Rocco	X		X	X		X	
Giovanna		X	X		X		X

Adam DiLauro, Owner  
*Pizzeria DiLauro*  
Chagrin Falls, OH

### If we publish your idea, we'll send you \$100!

*La Trattoria's proven ideas come from successful Independent restaurateurs like you. What are you doing differently in your business (besides making great food) that adds to your success?! If we publish your idea, we'll send \$100 to say "Grazie!"*  
Call me, *La Trattoria* Editor Steve Rouse, at (800) 328-8667!



BUONA SALUTE È LA VERA RICCHEZZA ■ AMICI E VINI SONO MEGLIO VECCHIE

AMICIZIE E MACCHERONI, SONO MEGLIO CALDI ■ NULLA SI FA SENZA VOLONTÀ!