

By **DEBBIE PALMER**
The Post staff writer

It would be easy for Dan Jenks to cut a few corners – buy pre-shredded cheese, maybe, or use cheaper flour.

He won't even consider it.

"We use the best tomatoes. We make our own dough and sauce. We serve true baby-back pork spare ribs," Jenks said.

Freshness and quality are points of pride at Augie's Pizza & Ribs, 14084 State Road in North Royalton. The family-run business creates every pizza and entree from scratch, using recipes handed down through the generations.

Those who have tried Augie's food are sold.

"We sell every piece of lasagna my wife, Debbie, makes every day," Jenks said.

But he'd rather run out of an item than sacrifice quality.

"We won't sell food that's not the freshest it can be," said Jenks, who owns the business with his wife, Debbie. "Nothing comes out of the freezer."

And that's why the business, which has been firmly rooted in North Royalton for 21 years, is thriving.

"There are pizza wars going on all over northeast Ohio," Jenks noted. "You never want to be the cheapest. You want to be the best."

When competitors offer special deals

continued on page 25

Debbie and Dan Jenks have been serving quality food for 30 years.

Augie's

delivers quality and value

Pizza

Photos by AMBER MARSHALL.

continued from page 24

on their pizza, it means sacrificing quality, and that's something Augie's refuses to do. It's also something the customers appreciate.

"We're blessed we have a clientele that cares about the quality," he said. "We don't have to give things away to get people in the door."

The right ingredients

The family business dates back to 1964, when Debbie's parents, August and Mary D'Amicone, founded Augie's Pizza in Warrensville Heights. Dan and Debbie took over an Augie's location in 1979 before settling in North Royalton, bringing with them all the recipes and secrets that made the original Augie's such a success, from fall-off-the-bone ribs to the homemade Italian dressing people beg them to bottle.

They still slow-cook sauce 60 gallons at a time. They grind their own cheese and blend it themselves to get the perfect mix.

"Our pizza speaks for itself," Jenks said. We slow-bake it in a Ferris wheel-style gas oven. We don't rush the process."

Augie's is also known for the way it builds its pizzas, with the cheese on top and the toppings underneath.

"We've always done it that way. It's something that sets us apart," Jenks said.

It's no wonder so many Augie's customers are regulars who return week after week for the award-winning taste of



The comfortable dining room seats up to 50, many of whom will order the rigatoni and meatballs



the sauce, the crisp salads and the tender chicken wings.

"We give great value and a great product, and people recognize that," Jenks said.

It's a party

But pizza is only part of the business. Augie's catering is in big demand, serving corporate events during the week and private parties on the weekends.

The restaurant brings its same quality and freshness guarantee to its catering clients, whether they want honey-roasted chicken or a huge pan of pasta.

Recently, Augie's catered a breakfast and luncheon for the president of a major department store that included linens, china and stemware. The event took place in a vacant store at Westfield SouthPark mall in Strongsville — with no kitchen facilities.

"We nailed it," Jenks said. "It's what we do."

They also provide banquets for hospitals, sports teams and major corporations, as well as family parties. Their huge array of choices starts with appetizers like stromboli, spinach dip served in a pumpernickel bread bowl, a fruit tray, cheese and cracker tray, veggies and dip, fried ravioli, wings, chicken tenders and the "I can't make up my mind" appetizer — a full-size foil pan with ribs, garlic bread with cheese wedges, wings and mini potato pancakes.

Follow that up with a salad — there are a dozen choices, including homemade pasta salad and a number of green salads — and then move on to the main course.

Select a sheet pizza with your choice

of toppings or a white pizza, which includes broccoli and cauliflower on white garlic sauce.

Or pick a Party Pack, priced per person, of ziti marinara, stuffed cabbage, fried or honey roasted chicken, ribs and chicken, or Augie's famous lasagna. All of the Party Packs come with hearty helpings of side dishes.

Augie's Catering also offers party trays of sandwiches, featuring wraps, pita sandwiches, Italian subs and croissant sandwiches.

Entrees feature eggplant Parmesan, ribs, chicken in a variety of styles like marsala, honey-roasted, lemon and Parmesan, kielbasa and sauerkraut, stuffed cabbage, barbecue beef and honey-glazed ham. Then there are the pastas — from ravioli to fettuccine alfredo — and sides like mashed potatoes, baked beans with bacon, green bean casserole and rice pilaf.

Desserts feature mini cream puffs, gourmet cheesecakes and fresh baked brownies and cookies. Also available is breakfast, either hot or continental.

Homemade value

Of course, plenty of customers like to relax in Augie's comfortable dining room, which seats 50. Local baseball and soccer teams often take advantage of the large tables for their postseason parties, and families find a good value when they pick Augie's for a dinner out.

"In these economic times, a family

continued on page 26

continued from page 25

of four can eat well here for \$20," Jenks promised.

Eat well, indeed. How about chicken wings in a variety of flavors or a slab of Augie's famous ribs, served with garlic bread with cheese and cole slaw? A half-slab dinner is priced at only \$8.95.

Or maybe start with Joey's Famous Cheese Fries, mini potato pancakes, mozzarella sticks, onion rings, fried cheese ravioli, garlic bread or breaded mushrooms? They're all available.

Salads include the Uncle Pasta (Anti-pasta left home, the menu claims), which is loaded with cheese, pepperoni, green olives, black olives, tomatoes, provolone cheese and pepper rings on a bed of lettuce. There's also the Big Aunt Tillie featuring grilled chicken, bacon and Swiss cheese on romaine lettuce with croutons and tomato.

A lasagna dinner, including a salad and thick-cut Italian bread, is value-priced at \$7.95. Hot and cold subs and sandwiches, loaded with meats, cheeses or veggies, are \$4.95 to \$5.50.

Specialty pizza offerings feature the Don Ho, with honey ham, pineapple and double cheese; the Guido, a white pizza with fresh tomato, basil, provolone and fresh mozzarella; the Socrates, a white pizza featuring crumbled feta, spinach, tomato and provolone; and the Mama Mia, a new menu item that features a homemade crust lightly rubbed with garlic butter, then topped with spaghetti sauce, penne pasta, meatballs and provolone.

Topping it off

Debbie and Dan have worked together in the restaurant business for 30 years, which means their three sons grew up in the kitchen. Each as gone on to his own success — William now works for the Cleveland Indians, Daniel is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and Joseph is a student at Walsh University.

They are understandably proud of their kids and their restaurant and also of their 30 employees, who Dan said have contributed greatly to the success of the business.

"We have great people here," Dan said. "The customers benefit from the passion our employees come to work with every day."

That sense of pride shows in everything Augie's serves.

If they were to switch to less expensive ingredients, for example, customers might not notice the difference.

Dan and Debbie would, though.

"It's all about quality and great service," he said. "We do what it takes to take care of our customers. They're very loyal to us, and we're very loyal to them."

The proof is in the popularity of Augie's.

"We're blessed, but we work at it every day," Jenks said. "We really work hard to do things right."

Contact Augie's by phone at 440-237-2080 or by fax at 440-237-1488, or visit www.augiespizzaonline.com. The restaurant is open 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4 to 9 p.m. Monday through Wednesday; 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4 to 10 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday; and noon to 9 p.m. Sunday.