

Ken's Pizza flashback will be permanent addition to Mazzio's menu

Mazzio's latest menu addition is a blast from the past and nod to company chairman and founder Ken Selby's original product.

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TULSA — Letters and emails from Mazzio's customers have stacked up on company President Greg Lippert's desk since Ken's Pizza was resurrected three months ago.

Diners say they love the thin, crispy crust and spicy sauce. It reminds them of the pizza parlors of the 1960s and '70s, when they perhaps tasted their first bite of pizza.

And because of the customer response — not the pizza sales, which have also been impressive — Lippert said Ken's Pizza will become a permanent addition to Mazzio's menu.

“We not only started selling a lot of Ken's, but we started getting a ground swell campaign of customers saying ‘keep it on the menu,’” Lippert said.

And those customers are putting their money where their mouth is. Mazzio's has sold more than \$2 million worth of Ken's Pizza in its 100 Oklahoma stores since February.

TASTE OF HISTORY

The recipe was created by Ken Selby, a public school teacher who in 1961 opened a small pizza joint in Tulsa and served the pies from 4 p.m. to close. He eventually quit teaching to establish a chain of Ken's Pizza restaurants.

Ken's Pizza grew to 100 locations, including several in Oklahoma City, and was the foundation for Mazzio's Italian Eatery. The company in the mid-'80s began converting many of the Ken's locations to Mazzio's, though there are still six Ken's sites still in operation, including one in Sapulpa.

To mark 50 years since Selby opened his first store, Mazzio's decided to bring back “the pizza that started it all” as a limited time promotion. But after months of emails, Facebook comments — even a typed letter on professional letterhead — Lippert decided to give the people what they want.

“Even though we advertised it, the ability to keep it on the menu has been driven by customer response,” he said. “It's a testament to how strong and powerful the Ken's brand is.”

Vicky Reid, of Oklahoma City, wrote “we have been to eat pizza more this past month than in years. Thanks again for bringing back a favorite.” Others recalled working for a Ken's or having the pizza as a family treat.

THAT'S A PIZZA PIE

At 15 inches, Ken's Pizza is slightly larger than a Mazzio's pizza.

The crust is made with less water, giving it a crisper texture. And the sauce recipe includes fresh tomato tidbits and a blend of spices, giving it a bold flavor.

Ken's Pizza costs \$10.50 for one or \$19.61 for two — a nod to the year the first restaurant opened. And Selby is still around, acting as chairman and the sole shareholder in Mazzio's LLC.

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