

# Pizza, the old fashioned way

Story by Phil Melnychuk

The door into Jim's Pizza opens easily with a gentle creak, cushioned by a soft spring that squeaks like a saloon door in an old western movie.

Follow the twist and turn of the hallway into the yellow kitchen bathed in yellow fluorescent light - and the sweet smell of rising dough wraps around you like an olfactory cocoon.

It's 5 p.m. and Peter Daflos is well into making next day's batch of pizza crusts.

He's mixing white and unbleached flour into a huge boulder-sized blob of dough, enough for about 140 pizzas.

Then with a square-looking chopping knife and a rocking motion, he chops off chunk after chunk of dough and plops them on to a scale, marked small, medium, large, and sorts them into rows.

He doesn't stop a minute. Pressing, rolling and kneading. In some places, the old arborite counter is worn down to the wood.

Then, with a moment of silence and tenderness, with the dough ready for rising, he lays a woolen blanket on top, as a parent would put a newborn to bed.

Daflos makes every pizza crust himself and every drop of tomato sauce, made in 80-litre batches, that's spread on to them.

"Of course," he says.

"Who's going to make it for me?"

He's been at the counter for 29 years, since he and his wife Eva bought the restaurant from Jim Kosmas. That was just a few years after Peter arrived in Maple Ridge in 1976, two years after immigrating from Greece.

The place is aptly named. Three Greek guys first opened it in 1979. They all were named Jim.

Two soon dropped out and the remaining Jim - Jim Kosmas - later sold it to Peter, who in the first year tripled sales after switching from thin-crust "Toronto-style" pizza to inch-thick pizzas cooked in pans.

Peter, 56, and his wife Eva, and later helped by their three kids, have been pumping out pizzas ever since.

The evening rush starts and Peter and Eva disappear into the kitchen, behind the swinging doors.

"Hi. So your total's going to come to \$31.50," a cashier says on the phone.

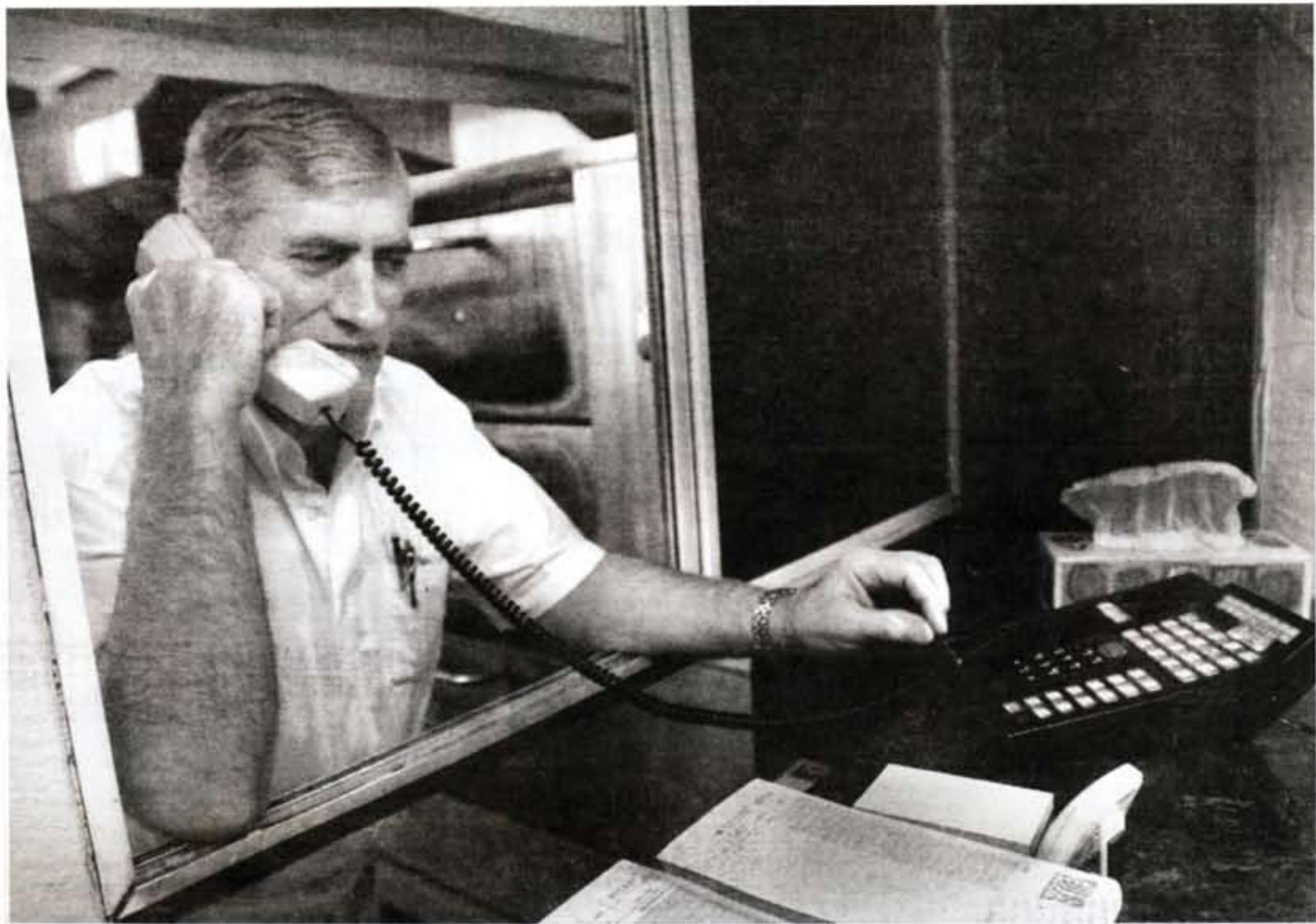
"It comes to \$33.50 altogether," another server tells a customer.

In the warm glow of the kitchen, comforting on a cold day, Peter and Eva lean over the counter and study each order slip with the concentration a physician would study X-ray charts.

They each know what the other needs as they grab pizza crusts, apply the toppings, slap them into the oven. When the pizzas are done, Eva wields a machete-like knife and slices and boxes up the take-outs.

"I need some pizza crusts. Do I have anymore in there?" Peter asks a high school helper.

Eva has her game face on, a set



Simone Ponne/THE NEWS

Peter Daflos has owned Jim's Pizza since 1979; he still makes every pizza himself, by hand, every day.



look on her tired face.

"Is it ready?"

"Yup."

Then Peter hunches over the counter and begins his labour of love.

He's crafting a large pizza - with olives, pineapple, tomatoes, feta cheese and mozzarella - three types of mozzarella are needed to get the right taste and consistency.

"I need some Italian sausage ... Italian sausage."

He's anxious, not impatient, with his staff.

"Thank you," he says when it shows up.

He turns around and plops a four-centimetre thick steak on the hot grill behind him. It hisses and smokes, the fat bubbling and turning burnt and crisp.

The phone rings.

The radio blares.

"OK, I need a baked potato."

It arrives. "Thank you."

"Do we have a driver here?"

No, says the staffer, but Eva knows a driver's nearby, waiting to deliver the cardboard boxes and brown paper bags to someone hungry.

"Delivery," she calls out.

Peter walks slightly bent over. He has four collapsed vertebrae, the logical cause - hours spent bent over the stove and counter - the result of working hard all day.

"What do you think?" he says.

His right hip and left knee have been replaced.

"What happens to a car when you put way too many miles on it?"

"That's why I walk like a duck."

Peter works seven days a week, from about 5 p.m. to past midnight.



Every month. All year. Except for Christmas Day.

He loves his job.

"Yeah, but I don't like it to death."

He'd love to be able to take a holiday with his wife, go back home to his native Greece. He hasn't gone hunting in four years.

He'd cut back the hours, if he could, but constant shortages of staff means he has to be in the restaurant every day. And with three kids still getting established in their careers, he can't think of retiring yet.

"I have a problem getting good employees. I just can't let anybody do this. I have to do it myself."

Currently, he has five full-time staffers. He would hire 10 if he could find them. But it's tough getting qualified staff.

Wages aren't the issue. Many po-

tential employees who show up are transients or have personal problems. The ones who stay, such as his drivers, make good money and have been around for years.

He's seen the downtown change and remembers when city hall was where the Zeller's parking lot is now and when there was only one traffic light, a flashing amber, at Dewdney Trunk Road and 224th Street.

Apart from the fresh ingredients from scratch, there is no secret to making good pizza.

"It has to be good for family. Then it's good enough for customers."

Given the small profit margins (the monthly restaurant overhead is \$8,000), there is a temptation to cut corners.

If you want quality, you have to pay for it - in the cost you pay for good ingredients and the time needed to cook them properly.

Some pizza places use imitation cheese made out of soya.

"When you go cheap, you're going to cheat the people for a short time. You're not going to be around long."

Just recently, though, he thought Jim's might not be around, temporarily at least.

An application for a new building, a four-storey condo/commercial application for on his location went to Maple Ridge council.

But Peter has been told by landowner Dave Prakash the project has been scratched because of difficult soil conditions. Now, Peter's just waiting to sign a long-term lease, to confirm he won't have to move soon.

Until then, he's taking it week by week, day by day, pizza by pizza.