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PIAZZA AND PAPA'S RANCH HOUSE
TWO RESTAURANTS, TWO TASTY EXPERIENCES

HIKING THE TAHOE RIM TRAIL

Piazza

INVITES
CARSON CITY
TO ENJOY
CAFÉ
CULTURE



New restaurant shares
the best of Italy's
wines, cocktails,
and small plates.

STORY BY MEGG MUELLER
PHOTOS BY JARROD LOPICCOLO

Synergy is the magical outcome of blending two or more things—ingredients, if you will—that when combined, create something even greater than the original components. No matter how wonderful or powerful the ingredients are on their own, when they are blended together, the result is something that transcends the ordinary and becomes extraordinary.

It was with an impressive number of ingredients that Jenny and Mark Lopiccolo forged Piazza, which they call simply “A place to gather.” Located in historic Carson City on McFadden Plaza, Piazza, while certainly a place to gather, is also a place to eat scrumptiously, taste delicious wines and innovative cocktails, commune with friends and family, and above all relax.



Jenny and Mark Lopiccolo



The charcuterie board is awash with colors and flavors, and something to tempt everyone.



KIPPY S. SPILKER



FIRST INGREDIENT

Relaxation is a key tenet of Piazza, and it was that need to take a breath and get away from everyday stressors that was at the root of this new restaurant. Last fall, the Lopiccolos were in Italy visiting Mark's family. They'd been there a few times, and this trip, relaxing was the order of the day. Jenny was in a high-stress job, so the afternoon strolls to the local piazza, where they would sit with a Spritz—the classic Italian aperitivo—while munching on small plates of fat olives, cheese festooned with fruit, and other Italian delicacies; and enjoying the sights and sounds of the Italian afternoon were exactly what she needed.

"I thought 'I wish Carson City had a place like this,' " Jenny remembers. "Then it hit me; we have a plaza!"

The Lopiccolos own businesses on both sides of McFadden plaza, which is directly across from the Nevada State Legislature.

Jenny recalls she looked at Mark and told him "I'm not going back (to my job)...I can't do it anymore." The two started talking about how much they loved the café experience, and could they really bring it back to Carson City. The idea took root.

SECOND INGREDIENT

Neither Jenny nor Mark had any experience owning a restaurant; Jenny ran her own real estate businesses, and Mark owns a construction company. Mark loves to cook, but that doesn't necessarily translate into successful restaurants. But they did have what they felt was an ace in the hole: Charlie Abowd.

Charlie is a sort of legend in northern Nevada as the owner of Café at Adele's, a Carson City landmark for more than 40 years. The Lopiccolo's and Abowd family have been friends for decades; Mark's father created much of the stained glass used in Adele's for Charlie's father, in fact. Jenny and Mark knew such a friend could prove to be the ace up their sleeve, but timing could have stopped this crucial ingredient from being added to the mix.

In March of last year, Café at Adele's had suffered what seemed to be a non-catastrophic fire that started in the laundry room. As the months ticked by with Adele's closed and an impasse with the insurance company occurred, Charlie and his wife Karen made the decision to shut the restaurant down.

The Lopiccolos returned from Italy to hear the sad news and put plans to enlist Charlie's help on hold for a bit. They did reach out to two of Adele's most vaunted employees, Mark Nadreau and his wife Ellen, and found that much of the staff was looking for work, so they decided it was time to make the call to Charlie.

When they told him the news, he had one question.

"Are you crazy?" he remembers with a smile. "It was a very stressful time for me, but honestly when they reached out, it put a smile on my face. It was heartbreaking, but I felt good about my people, led by Mark and Ellen, well, they had a home. That's when I turned that page, and I started helping them out because I knew it was going to be successful."

Manchego-stuffed figs

THIRD INGREDIENT

Charlie came on as a consultant, and the Lopiccolos added Food & Beverage Manager Robin Shriver and Executive Chef Dan Burnham to the roster, both former employees of Adele's. The next ingredient was the menu, and for that it was a group effort.

Jenny knew the small plate concept she experienced in Italy was the way to go, and Mark—who is 94 percent Sicilian, and “The rest is Italian,” he says—was in complete agreement. Using Charlie's advice and experience, along with Chef Dan's input, the menu came together as another example of synergy.

“Dan is a great chef, so he has lots of great ideas,” Jenny says. “In fact, just about everyone touched the menu. There were some deal breakers, for sure, and Charlie told us that 20 items max was best, so it was pretty hard but it's just perfect.”

“We have great salads, small bites, lots of vegetarian and some vegan options, along with things like lamb lollipops in a whiskey peach glaze, which are amazing,” she continues. “We will adjust seasonally as fresh produce is available. We usually have one or two specials a night, depending on what Chef Dan finds at the farmer's market.”

One thing not on the menu but is a must-have is Mark's sourdough rounds. During times of stress, Mark heads to the kitchen to bake, and in doing so he's perfected a loaf that is so full of flavor with such a light

and sinful texture it's almost like something from the Old Country. And truth be told, he has a little help; his sourdough starter is 102 years old, passed down through the family from a pizza parlor in Naples.

“Oh my goodness,” Charlie exclaims at the mention of the bread, “I told him you have got to follow this up and open a bakery. His breads are breathtaking.”

Mark's sourdough is the crust for Piazza's flatbread pizzas of which the Sicilian version is the most popular item on the menu. The charcuterie board is a sampler's delight, beautifully designed with fruits, roasted vegetables, and nuts alongside cured meats and a variety of cheeses. The manchego is elegant and flavorful, while the gouda had the tiniest spice at the end which made for a wonderful taste experience. Marinated olives were creamy and flavored to perfection, and the daily special of figs stuffed with manchego cheese drizzled with balsamic and accented with pine nuts was a revelation in synergy, yet again. Bite after bite, it hit on every level of satisfaction.

No café culture is complete without a sumptuous wine menu and specialty cocktails





Left to right: Dan Burnham, Mark Lopiccolo, Jenny Lopiccolo, Robin Shriver, Ellen Nadreau, and Mark Nadreau



Ortigia Spritz



Sicilian flatbread style pizza



Chocolate truffles

bursting with creativity and flavor, and Piazza has both. Mark had help from Larry Ruvo and his team at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits of Nevada and has created a wine list full of traditional favorites and engaging surprises for every palate. The specialty cocktails are headed by the Ortigia Spritz, Piazza's Sicilian take on Italy's favorite cocktail. The addition of St. Germaine liqueur and a twist of grapefruit send this already-delicious cocktail into the realm of favorite libations ever. It's a light drink that complements the beautiful spread of dining options available and should be tried immediately.

Local beers on tap, adult milkshakes, and inventive mocktails are available, as well as a full bar.

WATCH IT GROW

With the right combination of ingredients, success is still not guaranteed, especially in northern Nevada's fickle restaurant landscape during a time of pandemic. The staff, Jenny says, is meticulous about following health restrictions because they want Piazza to be a respite and they want it to remain open for people to enjoy.

The Lopiccolos know the risks of opening a restaurant in 2020, but their desire to make this work gives them an edge.

"I love to cook, and I like to make people happy," Mark says of why it made sense to open a restaurant. "When I see people being happy, it just makes me happy."

Charlie weighs in: "So often in this business, people get into it and they are not people people. This couple is, and they are very talented and they have great vision. You can feel the energy and soul in the restaurant."

And in a final bit of synergistic perfection, Jenny adds: "We like to serve people. When we see people coming here and truly relaxing, it's just wonderful." 

JOIN THE MIX

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