RESTAURANTS OPENING, ADAPTING AS PANDEMIC Wears ON

BY PAM KRAKEN

It's only been a few months since Andrew Melone opened his long-anticipated breakfast restaurant in La Jolla, but the Bird Rock resident said the timing of his May 25 grand opening may be just right. "American Pizza is a take-and-bake pizza and pasta restaurant, so everyone can have a custom-built pie that they pick up, then bake at home in their own oven," he said.

"It was always our intention to open much earlier, but as it turns out, our business model — in light of everything going on — is positioned well for COVID. We never intended to open in a pandemic, but it might be a fortuitous break for us," Melone said.

While living in Chicago several years ago, Melone discovered a similar concept, Homemade Pizza Co., and was so impressed by the quality of the pizza that he became an investor. But the company collapsed in 2004 due to overly ambitious expansion plans. Melone said he always hoped to create a similar concept of his own. After returning to his native Southern California a few years ago, he settled on a former liquor store space at 7617 La Jolla Blvd., former site location. Melone said the biggest hurdle to overcome is catering to his customers' palate for customized pizzas that he fresh-made pizzas don't taste like bread, frozen-dried frozen pies. He said the secret ingredients he uses are never frozen, have no preservatives and are prepared to order, and the store's proprietary dough recipe is designed to slow-bake in a pizzeria-worthy oven, airy crust in just 10 to 15 minutes in a 450-degree oven.

The menu features seven custom pizzas and a build-your-own topping option ranging from $8 for a 12-inch cheese pizza to $24 for the 14-inch classic with wild mushrooms, truffle oil, and Parmesan cheese. There are also entire salads and two house-made pasta dishes: a mac-and-cheese side for two for $8 and lasagna for $10. The restaurant also has a fresh-prepared plate-size chocolate chip cookie and milk of ice cream and from Amy's Creamery in Falmouth.

If the business is successful, Melone said he hopes to expand to a total of five stores in San Diego County in five years, with the La Jolla flagship serving as the central commissary kitchen. For details and ordering information, call 858-746-6706 or visit americangrillpizza.com.

Breakfast Republic opens walk-up taco shop

As part of its multi-pronged pandemic-inspired move to open grab-and-go and restaurant options, San Diego-based restaurant group has opened the California Taco Club, a authentic Mexican food service window at the Pacific Beach location of the Republic. The eatery serves tacos, burritos, enchiladas, and housemade handcrafted tortillas, and has been a hit with customers since opening.

The new pantry wall at Homeblend Solana Beach

Homeblend Solana Beach and The Gluten Free Baking Co. in North Park have added to the pandemic by permanently transitioning a portion of their-space into two pantry walls that stock gluten-free goods that gluten-intolerant customers can no longer find in stores. Homeblend, a 5-year-old cafe at 648-B B St., opened an online store in-store pantry selling gluten-free, dairy-free, and nut-free foods and ingredients for home cooks. Visit tinglealeat.com for more information.

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