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THE DISH News from San Diego's restaurant industry

RESTAURANTS OPENING, ADAPTING AS PANDEMIC WEARS ON

BY PAM KRAGEN

It has taken more than two years for Andrew Melone to open his long-anticipated American Pizza Mfg. restaurant in La Jolla, but the Bird Rock resident said the timing of his July 22 grand opening may be just right. American Pizza is a take-and-bake pizza and pasta restaurant, customers preorder a custom-built pie that they pick up, then bake at home in their kitchen oven.

"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 pies that he became an investor. But the company collapsed in 2014 due to overly ambitious expansion plans. Melone said he always hoped to create a similar concept of his own. After returning to



COURTESY OF JAMES TRAN

A take-and-bake pizza from newly opened American Pizza Mfg. in La Jolla.

his native Southern California a few years ago, he settled on a former liquor store space at 7402 La Jolla Blvd. for his first location.

Melone said the biggest hurdle to overcome with customers is convincing them that his fresh-made pizzas don't taste like bland, freezer-burned frozen pies. He said the scratch ingredients he uses are never frozen, have no preservatives and are prepared to order, and the shop's proprietary dough recipe is designed to slow-bake into a pizzeria-worthy, chewy, airy crust in just 10 to 15 minutes in a 425-degree oven.

The menu features seven

custom pizzas and a build-your-own topping option ranging from \$13 for a 12-inch cheese pizza to \$23 for the 14-inch Edsel pie with wild mushrooms, truffle oil and Parmesan cheese. There are also entree salads and two house-made pasta dishes: a mac-n-cheese side for two for \$11 and lasagna for four for \$28. The restaurant also has a fresh-baked pizza-size chocolate chip cookie and pints of ice cream from JoJo's Creamery in Encinitas.

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) 246-6756 or visit americanpiz-zamfg.com.

Breakfast Republic opens walk-up taco shop

As part of a multi-pronged pandemic-inspired move to open grab-and-go restaurant options, Johan Engman of Rise & Shine Hospitality Group has opened California Taco Club, a walk-up Mexican

food service window at the Pacific Beach location of his Breakfast Republic restaurant at 4465 Mission Blvd. The eatery serves tacos, burritos, ceviches and housemade horchata for takeaway and patio seating. This follows Engman's opening of three Eggies walk-up breakfast sandwich shops around San Diego since May. Visit californiatacoclub.com.

Cohn moves Island Prime to floating deck

With its San Diego Bay-view restaurant Island Prime restaurant closed due to countywide health orders, Cohn Restaurant Group has kept the restaurant afloat by moving its tables and chairs outdoors to the adjacent Harbor Float, a party-deck annex of its floating Coasterra restaurant and special event space at 880 Harbor Island Drive in San Diego. With seating for 68, the new alfresco Island Prime is serving a limited menu of Island Prime favorites including Kumai oysters, lemon ricotta-stuffed zucchini and filet mignon trio. Visit cohnrestaurants.com islandprime.



JESSICA DAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY

The new pantry wall at Homestead Solana Beach.

Restaurants open pantries to boost takeout business

Homestead Solana Beach and The Gluten Free Baking Co. in North Park have adapted to the pandemic by permanently transitioning a portion of their space into pantries selling grocery items for grab-and-go sales.

Homestead, a 2-year-old cafe at 346-B S. Cedros Ave. owned by Jamie and Marie Brawn of Leucadia, has converted part of its indoor bodega selling fresh produce, eggs, pasta, milk, canned goods, deli items, wine, beer and household items. It is still serving a reduced menu of its sandwiches, salads and

famed gluten-free waffles. Visit homesteadsolanabeach.com.

Roanna Canete opened Gluten Free Baking at 4594 30th St. just weeks before the pandemic hit. She has since revamped her menu to bake more of the gluten-free baked goods that gluten-intolerant customers can no longer find in stores. She also has built an in-store pantry selling gluten-free foods and ingredients for home cooks. Visit thefbak-ingco.com.

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