

# Making food that makes people smile

*At Vinny's Pizza & Pasta in Cranford, it's business as usual*

For Vinny Savinelli, the last year has been all about flexibility.

When the pandemic struck, restaurants were limited to pickup and delivery. Vinny's Pizza & Pasta, a neighborhood favorite in Cranford for years, adjusted.

Savinelli and crew had always been pickup and delivery specialists. But they also offered indoor dining and catering. All their efforts moved to takeout. The restaurant that was usually bustling with customers was changed to a room with tables that had become workstations where staff took phone orders. Pizza boxes were stacked all over. And the crew was quickly moving around the kitchen making fresh pizza and other Italian dishes. When outside dining was allowed, tables with umbrellas popped up. Heaters were added when the weather got cold.

Finally, inside dining was allowed at 25% capacity. Tables — separated by large dividers — were again used for guests. And now more guests are allowed inside. "It's been a wild ride. A rollercoaster," Savinelli said.

"We've had to shift and shift and shift to do what's best for public health, our customers and my employees."

For Savinelli, the move to outside and then inside dining was a big deal. "I love talking to my customers. They are my neighbors. My friends," he said. "I want to hear about their lives, their businesses and see their reaction to the food."

At a time when many restaurants closed and might never reopen, Savinelli considers himself lucky. His business had multiple revenue streams before the virus struck.

Vinny's Pizza & Pasta always offered pickup and delivery — direct from the restaurant and through multiple online apps. Indoor dining was a hit as well with the lunch crowd and for family dinners. Then there was catering for parties, meetings at the office and sports events.

Flexibility is nothing new for Savinelli. But it's always centered around pizza. Growing up in West Orange, at an early



When the pandemic hit, Vinny's Pizza & Pasta quickly adapted, offering outdoor seating and mobilizing staff.

age he was helping at his father's restaurant and learning to make pizza. In college, there were studies during the week and making pizza on weekends. After graduation, he went into the corporate world and still went back to making pizza some evenings.

Finally, he realized his heart was in pizza. His heart was in making good food that his friends and neighbors would enjoy. So, he quit the corporate world and opened a restaurant. Later, he sold his Cranford restaurant and opened another in Martinsville. Several years later, when he closed that place and opened another across from the Cranford movie theater, it was as if he had never left.

"This is not just a job for me," he said. "This is a special place. This is where I get to make food that makes people smile."

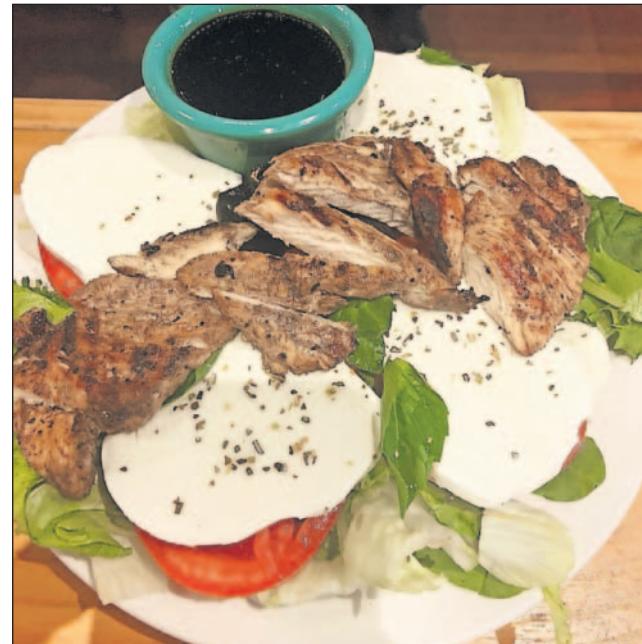
The dining room is adorned with Cranford sports memorabilia and photos of Italian and Italian American legends. It's a comfortable place. And Savinelli wants to meet you. Savinelli wants to talk to you.

"In between cooking and making pizza, I'm walking around — at a safe distance, of course — talking to people. Doing that is a special perk of the job."

Vinny's Pizza & Pasta is a family business — owned by



Vinny's Pizza & Pasta offers a variety of delicious menu options.



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Vinny and wife, Theresa. Their teenage children, Niki and Dominic, also help out.

"I know we'll be wearing facemasks for a long time, but it is so great to serve more people. We've been in our homes too long. People want to get out. And I can't wait to see them."

Vinny's Pizza & Pasta is located at 28 Eastman St., Cranford. Order online at [VinnysPizzaAndPasta.net](http://VinnysPizzaAndPasta.net) or call 908-709-9000.



Vinny's Pizza & Pasta is known for its fresh, tasty Italian dishes.

— Ron Ostroff