

BUSINESS

WATERLOO CHRONICLE

La dolce vita

Vincenzo's returns to its Waterloo roots bigger and better than ever

BY CHARLOTTE PRONG PARKHILL
Chronicle Staff

The night before opening the new location of their family grocery and deli, Tony and Carmine Caccioppoli had one last thing to do.

Before turning off the lights and heading home, they hung a portrait of their father Vincenzo over the main entrance, smiling at the customers.

Some of those customers have been coming to Vincenzo's for 42 years — loyally following the business from its origins on Bridgeport Road in Waterloo, to Belmont Village, and finally to Waterloo, at the Bauer lofts development.

"That's the emotional part for me, that my Dad hasn't seen this," said Carmine.

He's proudly giving a tour of the newly built 15,000 square-foot space that is three times larger than its Belmont predecessor. A modern interior of polished cement floors, exposed ductwork and oversized subway tile is home to the old-world Mediterranean charm that Vincenzo's is known for.

The Caccioppolis have come a long way. With the original simple moniker of Italian Canadian Foods, Vincenzo and his wife Rita opened their grocery in the living room of their Bridgeport Road home in 1967. Carmine was just one year old, and spent his days in the store with his mom while Vincenzo continued to work in a factory.

Tony and Carmine eventually took over the business and expanded it to Belmont Avenue in Kitchener in 1992, renaming the store in honour of their father, who died just six weeks later.

By the turn of the millennium, the Mediterranean emporium had grown wildly popular and they knew they needed even more space.

Now they're back to their roots



Carmine and Tony Caccioppoli are in the demonstration kitchen at Vincenzo's new location in Waterloo. A mainstay of Mediterranean cuisine for over 40 years, the grocer and deli has expanded to more than triple its size.

CHARLOTTE PRONG PARKHILL PHOTO

in Waterloo, on Caroline Street, just down the road from the original Italian Canadian Foods on Bridgeport.

With more space and more light, Carmine hopes it will better showcase the unique products they've been known for over the past 40 years, while attracting a new clientele.

"We're not a health food store, nor do we pretend to be. But the basis of our food is a Mediterranean diet — it's always been a healthier diet."

To that end, Vincenzo's now carries more specialty items, like kosher and gluten-free foods, than they ever have before.

There's a huge selection of grocery items from around the world. There's the counter that has

become a destination for a wide range of cheeses, deli meats and sandwiches made to order. There are rows and rows of salads, many prepared on site from family recipes.

There are bakery items with the best products from a dozen suppliers, and stacks of Caccioppoli cannoli. Large crockery jars of olives are lined up beside the fresh pasta and sauces.

"We purposely kept some of the familiarities of Belmont and brought them over here; for our staff, but also for our long-term customers," said Carmine, who started helping out in the shop when he was seven years old.

"When we have that original Bridgeport customer, there's always a special place for them,

because I served every single one of those customers for many years. Then in Belmont, we had another very special group of customers that we got to know."

New to the store is a pizza oven and a demonstration area complete with overhead mirror so the audience can see what is being prepared.

There's also a seating area where you can settle in with a sandwich, and coffee or espresso. This summer, it will be expanded to an outdoor patio space.

"I can't tell you how many times I looked out the window at Belmont and saw people sitting in their car, drinking their coffee and eating their sandwiches," Carmine said.

Partnerships with other local

businesses are another thing that makes the new Vincenzo's a unique shopping experience.

Seafood fans can pick up the catch of the day, among other things, at the Caudle's Catch Seafood counter. For local, naturally produced meat, they can head to the Bauer Butcher, also inside the store.

"We've been having a very positive reception," Carmine said. "They've got the products, they've got the experience. You get it here, it's all seamless at the checkout. So that marriage has worked well."

Another partnership that works well? The Caccioppoli family itself. All five kids still live within a few kilometres of their mom.

"We do fight sometimes," Tony admits. "But then we just come in the next day and get back to work."

Despite being around food all day long, the two brothers have managed to stay trim.

That's in part because they work so hard. Along with their sister-in-law Pat and niece Carla DaSilva, they've been putting in long days since last August preparing for the grand opening.

As for their mom, she's now 85 years old and in a wheelchair, but she still keeps an eye on the business she grew from the ground up with her husband Vincenzo.

"She still calls here every single day," Carmine said. "I'm looking forward to getting my mom in here to sort of give us the thumbs up."

Vincenzo's

150 Caroline St. S., Waterloo
(in the Bauer buildings)
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