

The Trentonian

Mafalda's Restaurant caters to triathletes this weekend



By Tammy Duffy

We are extremely fortunate in Mercer County to have access to a wonderful park, Mercer County Park. The park has been the hosts of some of the United States largest athletic events. On July 19th and 20th they are hosting the NJ Triathlon, The NJ triathlon this weekend is the largest triathlon in the state of New Jersey.

This weekend, Mafalda's restaurant (3681 Nottingham Way in Hamilton, NJ) is the only restaurant offering catering to the athletes competing in the triathlon. They put together a pasta dinner and triathlete specials for the thousands of triathletes that are in town to compete in the NJ triathlon. Anthony Maimone, Anthony Lettera, Michael Lettera are the owners of MAFALDA'S and sports is an important part of their lives. Owner, Anthony Lettera said, "This is such an important event for Hamilton township, it was the natural thing to do. I love athletes; my grandkids all play sports, soccer, lacrosse and football and we love it."

Mafalda's history started over 70 years ago in the Bronx. This is a restaurant deep in local tradition and intimately involved with the community.

It all began when Mafaldas's owner, Anthony Lettera's father Mike, who began making pizzas at the tender age of 12 years old. Mike Lettera initially went into business with his father Tony. They sold produce from a pushcart in NYC. Then in the 1950's they moved to Trenton, NJ and opened a chicken farm on Kuser Rd. He ended up losing the chicken farm in a card game one night so they then then opened up Mike and Pez's a deli in Chambersburg . After that they then opened Tony's pizzeria in Bordentown--- and the Villager in New Hope in the 1970's. This is a family entrenched in the restaurant business for many decades.

In the early 80's they opened up the Yardville Hotel (at that time there was no restaurant just a bar and liquor store) Then in a few months they opened a restaurant there as well being wildly successful.

Tony passed away in 1946. After Tony's passing Mike worked in several restaurants in the area. Learning the trade that would ultimately lead to the recipes and traditions still being followed some 80 years later. Mike and Matty along with Tony Pez opened an Italian deli in the Burg. There they built a successful business catering to the Italian residents of the area. Several years later Mike's dream of owning a pizza restaurant came true and they opened in Hamilton, NJ. They opened another pizza restaurant in Bordentown, NJ shortly thereafter. At the same time their son Anthony opened a pizza restaurant in Newtown, PA.

Mike honed his cooking skills during the early days of being in business. He brought with him all of the old recipes handed down through generations. In 1984, Mike and Matty along with Chef Servino and Chef Rich Conti opened Lettera's Keg in Chambersburg. The Keg was another overnight success. Once again catering to the area's Italian residents along with a host of area dignitaries. In the early 80's the Keg was "the Place" to dine.

In 1989, Mike passed away and the Keg closed, but the dream of once again owning a restaurant did not die. Anthony along with his son Michael dreamed of keeping their father and grandfathers legacy alive. By now Michael had become a successful car dealer, but he remembered his early childhood

working at the Keg. Anthony Lettera, Michael Lettera and cousin Anthony Maimone decided to open another restaurant. The only fitting name for the new place could be Mafalda's of Hamilton. Named after the matriarch of the family, Anthony's mother, and Michael's grandmother, Matty. With all the great recipes from the past they have taken dining out to the next level. They specialize in Neopolitan cuisine. When customers leave the restaurant they say, "This was the best I ever had, I have to tell someone about this place." The entire family is involved with the menu and the cooking of the food. Anthony's sister, Rosemary, makes all the homemade manicotti and the fish is bought fresh daily. .

Sunday Gravy, Chicken Cacciatore on the Bone, home-made Crepe Manicottis, home-made Spinach Bread, Tripe Marinara and Gourmet Pizza are just a few of the items on the menu. Along with Executive Chef Jose they bring "old world" Italian dishes to life. All the desserts are homemade. Chef Jose is: "The hand", an Italian phrase meaning, he can cook anything. Everything put in front of him he can make a dish out of. Stop in to see this wonderful restaurant that is making a positive mark on our community.

MAFALDA'S is open Tues-Thurs: 11am-930pm, Friday: 11am-10:30pm, Saturday; 4pm-10:30pm and Sunday; 4pm-9pm.