

Thinking outside the b

In today's economy, restaurant owners finding new ways to keep business coming

By JAMES CLARK
Food Editor

We've all heard how bad the economy is in general, and how it specifically has hurt area restaurants by restricting the amount of consumers' disposable income.

But that doesn't mean area restaurateurs are sitting on their hands and accepting business as usual. Whether it be finding new revenue streams, taking a chance by rebranding a restaurant or trying to improve on an established brand, some local owners are taking action.

Lou Di Ventura, the 44-year-old Linwood resident who owns Ventura's Offshore Cafe at 2015 Shore Road in Northfield, has added a delivery option for his customers, and its paid off in a big way.

"We've been doing it for about a year now, and it's been a successful addition to our business," he said.

"We still want to maintain our high standards with the food we make available to the customer, but one thing we tried to do with our latest menu is put an emphasis on 'comfort food.' And, the delivery method is one more way for customers to access what we have to offer."

While Di Ventura might be focusing on late-night pizzas, a nearby eatery has a different time of day on its mind.

Egg Harbor Township resident Kelly Cannuscio, 49, co-owns Antonino's Jo-Jo's Ristorante at 2405 New Road in Northfield with her husband, Anthony. The Cannuscios decided to add some pep to their business by offering breakfast seven days a week. The results have been good so far.

"The breakfast option has been available to customers for a month and a half, and we've had a decent response," Kelly Cannuscio said.

"It's been pretty slow on Sundays, but for something that not all of our customers know about yet, we've been pleased with the amount of foot traffic."

Antonino's Jo-Jo's serves breakfast from 8 to 11 a.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on weekends. Though they seen moderate success so far, Cannuscio isn't sure breakfast will be a permanent fixture for their business.



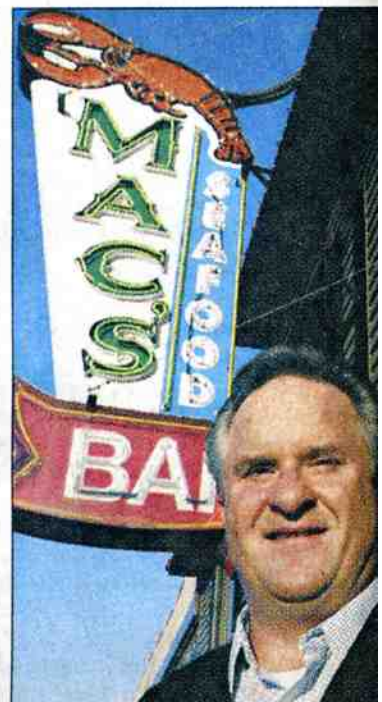
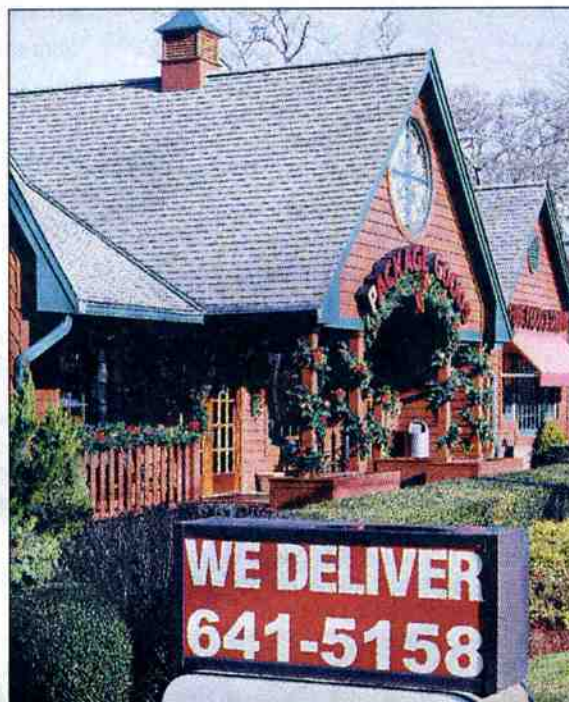
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weeks," she said. "One factor that's working in our favor is the quality of the menu we have come up with. The customers are very satisfied because it caters to everyone. There are bagels with lox, fresh fruit ... just about everything you could want for your first meal of the day."

Di Ventura and the Cannuscios decided tweaking their business model was the best way to go. But over in Somers Point, Dan Anderson decided to build his customer base from scratch.

The 57-year old Galloway Township resident co-owns the old Mac's Seafood at 908 Shore Road with his wife, Sandi. After much deliberation, they've decided to change the name of the venerable eatery to Sandi Pointe.

"It was a very difficult decision, because Mac's has been around since 1924," said Dan Anderson. "We involved our customers in the process, and they overwhelmingly decided a name change would be best. I've found that the locals in Somers Point feel a great deal of 'ownership' in regard to their local restaurants. It's been an eye-opening process."

Anderson says some of the changes made by the previous owners dictated the name change.

"If we had bought the old Mac's as it was left by the Previti family, that would have been one thing," he said. "But their were other owners in the interim, and we just decided starting fresh would be the wise way to go. It gives us a chance to put our stamp on it."

Then there's the case of Up The Creek restaurant at 139 E. Faunce Landing Road in Absecon. Its recently been taken over by Egg Harbor Township residents Dominic and Vanessa Ricciardi. The couple chose to keep the existing name in place.

"We thought about changing it but, in the end, we decided it was best to keep the name and try to make people aware of the menu changes and how good the food would be with the new management," said Vanessa Ricciardi, a 29-year-old native of Lima, Peru.

"We're right on the water and we have a lot of fish-



Staff photo by Danny Drake



Staff photo by Anthony Smedile



Staff photo by Bill Cross

In top photo, Antonino's Jo-Jo's Ristorante in Northfield advertises its new breakfast offerings. In middle left photo, Ventura's Offshore Cafe in Northfield prominently displays a sign touting its delivery service. In middle right photo, co-owner Dan Anderson stands in front of the Mac's Seafood sign in Somers Point. He's changing the name of the restaurant to Sandi Pointe. In bottom photo, Up The Creek restaurant in Absecon is under new management but still uses the same name for the eatery.

ermen coming in for meals. We wanted to keep the working."

same customer base but definitely reach out and attract as many new ones as possible. From the response we've been getting so far, it really seems to be

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