

A New York Legend Goes West Dom DeMarco's Pizzeria

by Judy Kneiszel

Restaurateur Albert Scalleat has always been willing to travel for a good pizza, and when he found the best he had ever tasted, he worked for years to bring it home, a feat Lorri Davidson and other Las Vegas diners are grateful for.

"I'm a thin crust gal myself," Davidson says, "while my husband likes the deep dish. Both are just top notch at Dom DeMarco's Pizzeria."

Davidson is a Senior Service Planner for Southwest Gas Corporation, which provides natural gas service to Dom DeMarco's and approximately 1.8 million other commercial, residential and industrial customers in Arizona, Nevada, and California. She says Dom DeMarco's, located in the Summerlin neighborhood, is a wonderful addition to the Las Vegas dining landscape with an abundant menu beyond its legendary pizza, as well as beautiful décor and lovely, large climate-controlled patio. But how it came to be in this place is a long story.

The Tale of Dom DeMarco's

In 2006, Scalleat and his son-in-law, Jeff LaPour took a trip to New York to try Di Fara Pizza, a "hole in the wall" pizzeria that started getting a lot of good press in 1999 after having gone virtually unnoticed outside its Brooklyn neighborhood for three decades.

"We waited an hour and 45 minutes in the rain, but when I took a bite, I thought I'd died and went to heaven," Scalleat says.

Scalleat and LaPour, a Las Vegas developer, declared on the spot that they wanted to bring Di Fara pizza, created by an Italian immigrant named Dominick DeMarco in 1964, to their friends and neighbors in the West.

"I approached the manager behind the counter, who I found out was Dominick DeMarco Senior's daughter Maggie," Scalleat recalls. "I introduced myself and said



we'd love to have this pizza in Las Vegas. She said, 'my father gets offers from the suits on Wall Street all day long, but we're not interested in doing business with anybody.'

After being shot down that first time, Scalleat went back to Di Fara five more times in 2006 and 15 times in 2007.

"Finally, in 2008, she said, 'I'm going to introduce you to my brother Dominick Jr. He calls the shots,'" Scalleat

says. "He wasn't interested."

But Scalleat persisted, inviting Dominick Jr. and his wife to visit Las Vegas, and offering to put them up in the new Element hotel, a project developed by LaPour.

After thinking it over for a few weeks, Dominick Jr. took him up on the offer and, during that Las Vegas visit, Dominick Jr., Scalleat and LaPour spent time making pizza together.

"By the end of the week he realized how sincere we were about wanting to make Di Fara pizza in Las Vegas," Scalleat says. "The reason they never wanted to do business with anyone else was they didn't think anyone else would go through the work required to make their pizza exactly like they did."

Scalleat says he promised Dominick Jr. he would never pay for recipes and not use them.

Dominick Jr. talked to his father and Scalleat and LaPour were invited back to Brooklyn where they talked with the senior DeMarco for two days before he finally agreed to a deal.

Then, after all the hard work of convincing the DeMarcos to let them recreate their pizza and use their name, the harder work of figuring out how to do it began.

It's In the Water

It took two years to duplicate the Di Fara pizza taste and develop Dom DeMarco's Pizzeria & Bar. One of the biggest hurdles was replicating New York water in order to make dough of the exact consistency and flavor as the dough made at Di Fara.

"New York City has the best water in the country," Scalleat explains. "We took 12 bottles of water from Las Vegas and 12 from Di Fara and had them analyzed. They were so different in mineral content and chemical makeup it was amazing."

They worked with a water specialist for more than a year to come up with a system of five filters to turn Las Vegas water into something close to Brooklyn water. The reformulated water is now used to make dough and served in bottles to restaurant guests, giving them a free taste of New York.

Aside from the pizza and the water, there is little similarity between Dom DeMarco's and Di Fara.

"Di Fara has four tables and it's like you're going back in time. We have a modern, upscale place in an upscale neighborhood," Scalleat says.



Dom DeMarco's Pizzeria & Bar At a Glance

9785 W. Charleston Blvd.
Las Vegas, NV 89117
Phone: (702) 570-7000
www.domdemarcos.com

Owner: Albert Scalleat

Hours of Operation:
Open daily for lunch and dinner

Seating Capacity: 105 inside and 120
outside on the patio

Concept: New York pizzeria

Cuisine: Pizza and traditional Italian

Average Check Per Person: \$22

Menu Sampling:

- › Caesar Salad
- › Linguine & Clams
- › Grams Spaghetti & Meatballs
- › Cannoli
- Pizza
 - › Round New York Style thin crust
 - › Square-cut thick crust cast iron pan cooked Sicilian style



Albert Scalleat, owner, and Chef Renieri Caceres of Dom DeMarco's Pizzeria & Bar in Las Vegas worked with Lorri Davidson, Senior Service Planner for Southwest Gas Corporation, to find the best natural gas equipment to fill their needs both in the kitchen and outdoors.

“Professional cooks prefer natural gas because it’s much more controllable for sautéing. It’s also less expensive, it cooks better, and it’s always working.”

– Albert Scalleat, owner

LaPour designed Dom DeMarco's himself. It seats 105 guests inside and 120 on the patio, which can be used at least 8 months each year, thanks to a beautiful big natural gas fireplace and natural gas patio heaters to warm up cool evenings, as well as misters and umbrellas to make hot days more comfortable.

“It’s very comfortable out there all year except when it’s very windy,” Scalleat says. “The patio is extremely popular.”

Worth the Wait

Scalleat says Dom DeMarco's has a wait every night between 5 and 8 p.m. and sometimes at lunchtime between 12:30 and 1:30 p.m. An elegant bar with plenty of seating makes waiting much more pleasant than the wait on the street in the rain Scalleat and LaPour endured for their first taste of Di Fara pizza.

“Thankfully we’ve been extremely busy,” Scalleat says.

Dom DeMarco's has to do a high volume because their margins are very slim he says. That's because in order to keep his promise and make authentic Di Fara pizza, Dom DeMarco's must cook the sauce for six hours, and use cheese, tomatoes and olive oil from Italy.

“At Di Fara, they use the most expensive stuff you can buy because it’s the best,” Scalleat says. “That’s why their pizza is so expensive, because it costs a lot to make.”

At Di Fara, a large 15-inch round thin crust pie is priced at \$28. Scalleat says \$18 for the same pie is as high as it could be priced in the Las Vegas market.

“They pay really high rent in New York,” Scalleat says. “We pay lower rent but employ 62 people and it costs us more to import ingredients, so our margins are really narrow.”

Through Thick and Thin

At Di Fara, the DeMarcos bake pizza in a 1950s natural gas oven.

“It’s a style they don’t make anymore,” Scalleat says. “So we had Dominick Sr. and Jr. try out half a dozen ovens



and help us pick the one that would duplicate their pizza.”

The natural gas oven they chose has six decks. “It rotates like a Ferris wheel and gets to 650 degrees,” Scalleat says.

Like Di Fara's, Dom DeMarco's serves two styles of pizza, a round thin crust and a square-cut thick crust that's 12x18 inches. A large round cheese pizza is \$18; a full-size cheese square-cut is \$24. A round pizza cooks in seven minutes, but the “squares” take longer because they are thick and are baked twice.

“We bake the crust for 4 minutes with just a little sauce on it,” Scalleat explains. “Then it sits for a few hours before we top it and bake it for another 10 minutes. This par baking of the crust ensures it gets done without overcooking the toppings.”

About half the pizzas sold at Dom DeMarco's are square-cut and half are round – the same ratio as at Di Fara. The argument over which is better is the same in Las Vegas

and Brooklyn, too.

“Thick crust people argue with thin crust people about which is better,” Scalleat says. “Personally, some days I like one better and other days I prefer the other.”

The biggest selling pizza at Dom DeMarco's, whether round or square, is the “Big Apple” topped with pepperoni, Italian sausage, meatball, ham, mozzarella, and tomato sauce. A large round Big Apple is \$25; a full square-cut is \$30.

Beyond the Pie

The difference between Di Fara and Dom DeMarco's is obvious when guests walk through the doors and when they open the menu.

“At Di Fara's, all they sell is pizza,” Scalleat says.

“They’ve got about eight seats and a décor that’s pretty much original.”

Dom DeMarco’s, on the other hand, has a full menu of Italian favorites, including a Caesar salad that “people rave about” according to Scalleat and a wide variety of pasta dishes from Baked Ziti to Linguine & Clams.

But the most popular pasta entrée on the menu, Scalleat says, is the \$14 Gram’s Spaghetti & Meatballs.

“I use my mother’s recipe for meatballs made with veal, beef and pork,” he says. “We start out sautéing them over a natural gas flame to get them a little brown and then we put them in the sauce to finish.”

Brooklyn Chicken, a breaded chicken cutlet with red peppers and provolone in tomato sauce, is another popular dish. Scalleat attributes its popularity to its quality.

“We buy the best chicken you can buy and we season and marinate it ourselves,” he says. “We pan sear the chicken and cook it over a natural gas flame with red peppers and then add some provolone. People love it. We make a sandwich out of it too. People have to wait a little longer because we’re using fresh chicken, but when they get it and it’s so fresh and juicy and tender they don’t mind. We use it on our Caesar salad, too.”

The Brooklyn Chicken entrée is served with a side of pasta for \$12.

Southwest Gas Center Helps Equip Kitchen

“We have a natural gas pasta cooker that really helps us meet the demand for pasta in our kitchen,” Scalleat says. “It’s full all the time and the natural gas ensures the water is at a steady rolling boil constantly.”

Dom DeMarco’s: Natural Gas Equipment

- › 1 American Range grill, 13,000 BTU
- › 1 Fish Oven rotating pizza oven, 90,000 BTU
- › 2 Imperial fryers, 105,000 BTU
- › 1 Rosito Bisani pasta cooker, 45,00 BTU
- › 1 Vulcan range, 20,000 BTU
- › 1 Vulcan oven, 35,000 BTU
- › 1 Custom outdoor fireplace, 250,000 BTU

All the equipment in the Dom DeMarco’s kitchen is fueled by natural gas and for help in choosing the exact equipment they wanted, Scalleat and LaPour turned to the Southwest Gas Corp. Food Service Demonstration Center in Las Vegas.

“They came to the Center eight times to test recipes,” says Davidson. “Because the recipes are from Di Fara’s Pizzeria in Brooklyn, which is considered the best pizza in New York, they were committed to staying true to those unique tastes and quality. And they were equally committed to testing and finding the best natural gas equipment for the job.”

The Center, run by Davidson, has 1,000 square feet of indoor floor space and 20 feet of ventilation hood so foodservice professionals in Southern Nevada can gain hands-on knowledge of new natural gas cooking technologies before they buy.

“The utility connections are quick disconnects to provide ease and flexibility when we move appliances in and out for demonstration purposes,” Davidson says.

The Center also features an outdoor amenities area where state-of-the-art natural gas-fueled grills, patio heaters, lights, a fire pit, a free-standing outdoor fireplace, and a variety of tiki torches are displayed in comfortable outdoor room settings.

Southwest Gas Corporation also has a Food Service Demonstration Center in central Arizona to serve its foodservice customers in that region.

“Professional cooks prefer natural gas because it’s much more controllable for sautéing,” Scalleat says. “It’s also less expensive, it cooks better, and it’s always working.”

Just like Scalleat, who is always working to maintain the integrity of the brand and to serve the best of Brooklyn to diners in Las Vegas. 



Special Delivery – A VIP Secret Service

Dom DeMarco’s answers the call

Delivering pizzas and cannolis to the President of the United States was not what Albert Scalleat, co-owner and general manager of Dom DeMarco’s Pizzeria & Bar, expected to be doing on a Wednesday night in late January.

When the call came in, the person who answered explained that Dom DeMarco’s, which had only been open about seven weeks, didn’t offer delivery service.

“The caller then asked if he could speak to the owner,” Scalleat says. “When I got on the phone, he told me the order was for a VIP staying at the Element Las Vegas Summerlin, but he couldn’t say who. He just said it would be beneficial to me and my business to deliver this order.”

The caller asked for “six rounds and six squares” tipping Scalleat off to the fact that whoever it was, they must have been familiar with Di Fara in Brooklyn, because that’s the lingo used to order at the legendary New York pizzeria Scalleat partnered with to open Dom DeMarco’s.

“I said, ‘look, we’re extremely busy, it will be an hour and a half,’” Scalleat recalls. “They said that was okay.”

Then he looked around his busy restaurant and realized no one could be spared to make the delivery, so he volunteered to go himself, still unaware that he was bringing dinner for President Obama and his entourage.

As Scalleat arrived at the hotel, the streets were blocked off and there was a huge Secret Service and police presence.

“Helicopters overhead, police cars everywhere, guys in dark suits,” Scalleat says. “It was like a movie. I asked what was going on and someone said, ‘don’t you know the president is staying here?’ I had no

idea until that time.”

Once inside the hotel, Scalleat, and the huge takeout order, were thoroughly screened by the Secret Service.

“I had to take everything out of my pockets and put it on a conveyer belt, like at the airport,” he says. “The dozen pizzas and 20 cannolis went through, too.”

Scalleat hung around the hotel after making his delivery because a crowd had gathered in the lobby, and there was talk of the President making an appearance. He didn’t, but about 45 minutes after the delivery, one of the President’s aides found Scalleat.

“A guy came down and said, ‘the President told me to tell you that he loves the pizza and the cannolis,’” Scalleat says.

He didn’t catch the aide’s name, but Scalleat says he was thrilled by the opportunity to deliver the pizza.

“We got an unbelievable amount of press, and I had friends from all over the country calling me the next day. It was like being in a movie,” Scalleat says. “He’s the President – who would have thought?”

