

Earliest Pizza and Grinder Shops of Windsor Locks

Mel Montemerlo

March 9, 2016

This article presents a history of the earliest pizza and grinder shops in Windsor Locks. When did the first ones open? Who were the early entrepreneurs in this business? How did these businesses change? Anyone who has lived in Windsor Locks knows of the popularity of pizza and grinders in their town. Now it is time to take a look at how it all started. But first, let's take a brief look at just where pizza and grinders started.

The word "pizza" was first documented in the year 997AD in Gaeta, Italy, and it probably has its roots in the Italian flatbread known as foccacia, which was and is often topped with foods and sauce. However, pizza is not only an Italian thing. The ancient Greeks had a flatbread called "plakous" which was flavored with herbs, onion and garlic. In the sixth century BC, the soldiers of Persian King Darius baked flatbread covered with cheese and dates on top of their battle shields. It was, however, the Italians who brought pizza, as we know it, to America when so many Italians immigrated to the US between 1890 and 1930. (Wikipedia article on pizza)

The giant sandwich that folks from Windsor Locks call a "grinder" is also an international phenomenon. In the U.S., the grinder is also referred to as a: submarine, hero, hoagie, Dagwood, and a Po' Boy, but in Windsor Locks, it is a "grinder". Internationally there are the Mexican cemitas, the Cuban "Cuban", the Chilean chacarero, the Vietnamese Banh mi, the Indian vada pav, the Japanese Katsu sando, the Chinese Rou jia mo, the English Butty, the Greek gyro, the Danish Smorrebrod, the Polish zapiekanka, the Israeli sabich, the South African gatsby, and the Australian Vegemite sandwich. The world has been eating grinders for centuries. (from menuism.com)

Now let's take a look at the earliest pizza and grinder shops of Windsor Locks.

Frank's Restaurant

One of the earliest places in Windsor Locks to serve grinders was named "Frank's Restaurant". Frank's was an informal hamburger and hot dog shop on the corner of Elm St and Route 75. It was owned by owned and operated by Frank E. Hancock Sr and his brother Albert from the early 1950s to the mid 1960s. When did it close? They stopped putting ads in the Yellow pages somewhere between 1973 and 1978. Below is a photo of Frank's that was taken sometime in the 1950s. The photo was kindly made available by the Hancock family.

According to Albert Hancock's obituary in the Hartford Courant, Albert also owned the Dairy Cream on Turnpike Road since 1955. Albert later went on to be a food inspector for the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection for 22 years.

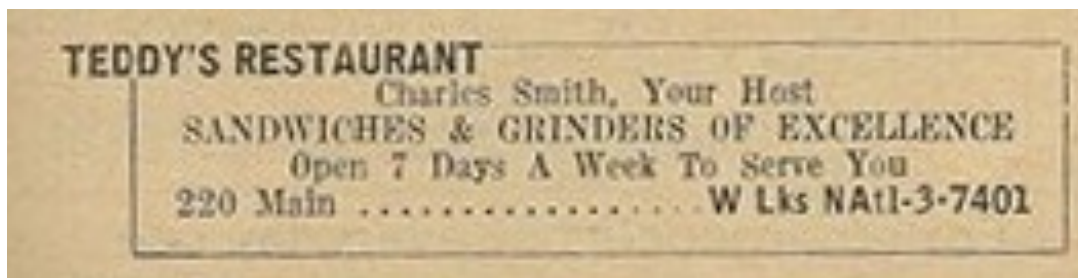


"Frank's" served hamburgs, hot dogs and grinders.
Corner of Elm St and Route 75, Windsor Locks, Conn. 1950s
Owned by Frank E. Hancock Sr.

Frank's had many loyal customers. The reports are that his grinders were delicious.

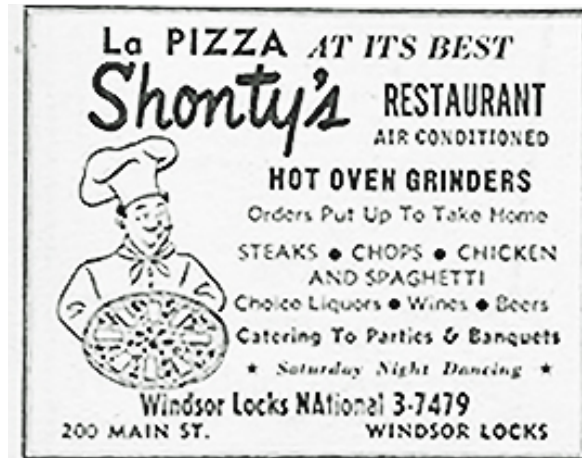
Teddy's Restaurant

Teddy's Restaurant at 220 Main St, had the following ad in the 1957 Yellow Pages. According to the ad below, Charles Smith was the "Host". They served sandwiches and grinders "of excellence". It was one of the earliest real Grinder Shops in Windsor Locks. We don't know when Teddy's was founded, but we know it was in existence in 1957, and that it specialized in Grinders. It didn't show up in any of the later Windsor Locks phonebook's that I found. It may have been short-lived, or it may have opened long before 1957.



Shonty's Restaurant

Shonty's Restaurant was located at 200 Main St., next to Bianchi's Restaurant. While it was a full service restaurant with steaks, chops and chicken, it also served pizza. Interestingly enough, they called it "LaPizza". The earliest Windsor Locks Yellow Pages I could find was 1957, and Shonty's had an ad in it. Shonty had ads in the 1967 Yellow Pages as well. It closed in 1968 or 1969 for the redevelopment of Main St.



From right to left: Shonty's Restaurant, Bianchi's Restaurant, Coly's Hotel.
At right is corner of Grove St. and Main St., Windsor Locks, Conn

Tommy's Restaurant

Tommy's restaurant, which was at 180 Turnpike Rd, had an ad which said "Italian and American Cuisine - Steaks, Chops, Spaghetti, Lasagna, LaPizza". Both Shonty's and Tommy's referred to pizza as "LaPizza". Tommy's had an ad in the 1956 Yellow Pages and had them as late as 1967. Tommy's was on Turnpike Road (Ella Grasso Highway), not far from Tony's Pizza Palace, Tanya's Pizza Palace and Piccolo's Pizza.



The Bridge View Restaurant

The **Bridge View Restaurant**, at 68 Main St, across from the bridge to Warehouse Point, had the following ad in the 1957 Yellow Pages. They specialized in Italian American home cooking and grinders to take out, as can be seen in the following 1972 Yellow Pages ad.





Owner Phil Lombardi in Front of Bridge View Restaurant. 1945.
Main Street, Windsor Locks, Connecticut
Later photos show a brick facade which was added about 1955.

The Bridge View Restaurant has been around for a long time, although I haven't been able to determine the year of its founding. Above is a photo of owner, Phil Lombardi in 1945. Below is another another photo of the Bridge View Restaurant during the 1936 flood. Look at the sign above the bridge on the left which says RESTAURANT. That was the Bridge View.



Main St. Windsor Locks during 1936 Flood. Above the left side of the bridge, you can see a "RESTAURANT" sign. That is the Bridge View Restaurant.

Following are two photos of the Bridge View Restaurant, before and after its remodeling in 1955.



Bridge View Restaurant (toward left, with striped awning)
Main St., Windsor Locks, Conn.



Bridge View Restaurant after 1955 remodeling

AD'S Pizzeria Restaurant

Giuseppe Albano and John DeLeo opened AD's Pastry Shop on Main St. in 1958. Below is a photo of that shop. Their last initials (Albano and DeLeo) provided the name "AD's". They sold pastry, but they featured pizza and grinders, as you can see in the sign in the photo below the word "Pepsi". The Main St. location only seated about eight customers. It's popularity grew.



AD's Pastry Shop, Main St., Windsor Locks, Conn. 1958

In 1995, they opened a much larger restaurant on Center St, near Rt. I-91. While the giant pizzas and grinders are still their featured items, AD's developed a wider menu of Italian specialties. They have a lunch and a dinner menu with a wide variety of Italian specialties. Their new name is "AD's Pizzeria Restaurant".

Below are photos of the new AD's Pizzeria Restaurant, and of its interior.



In 1995, AD's moved to its new location at 377 S. Center St.



AD's Pizzeria Restaurant on Game Day

After John DeLeo passed away, the job of running the shop went to his wife, Ana, and their two children, Joe and Alfie. The restaurant adopted another feature. It also added a sports bar, with a big emphasis on the Pittsburgh Steelers, although Alfie sometimes wears a Cowboy's jersey on game day. You can see the Pittsburgh Steelers fan club in above photo of the interior of the restaurant. AD's reviews on various restaurant rating websites indicate the place is well liked. They have some customers who have been regulars for more than 20 years.

Susan Famiglietti of Windsor Locks remembered that AD's pizzeria was at the end of a little strip mall on South Center Street for years right next to their current building.

Karen Pappa said: "I worked at AD's in the late 1960's and 70's. The original owners were Giovanni and his daughter Joanne Albano, the DeLeos only worked part time back then. Joanne and her younger sister Francis worked there the most back then. Anna was a young mother and only came in once in a while. John was a barber full time, and only worked there part-time also. When Joanne and Francis went back to Italy with their husbands, the DeLeos took over full time."

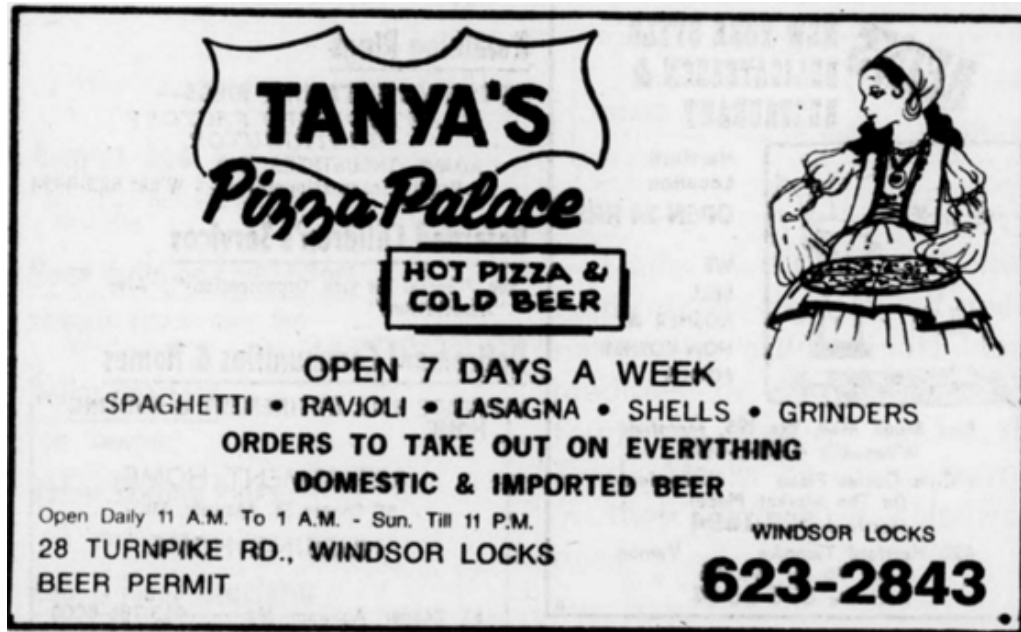
Tony's Pizza Palace

Tony's Pizza Palace had the following ad in the Windsor Locks Yellow Pages in 1970. I have not been able to find any other references to Tony's Pizza Palace on the internet or from contacts in Windsor Locks. From the ad, you can see that they also had Italian specialties such as spaghetti, ravioli, lasagna and shells. Tony's Pizza Palace was at 173 Turnpike Road, between Tanya's Pizza Palace and Piccolo's Pizza, which are discussed later in this article. All three of these Pizza shops were near where the Double Tree Inn is now.



Tanya's Pizza Palace

Now, in 2016, many Windsor Locks residents remember Tanya's Pizza Palace fondly. As with Piccolo's, photos of the store couldn't be found. Below is an ad from the 1972 Yellow Pages. Tanya's was near Piccolo's, which is on Turnpike Road (Ella Grasso Turnpike), where the Double Tree hotel is now. Robert Butryman, of Windsor Locks, said that he loved Tanya's Pizza. Tanya's Pizza Palace located near Piccolo's Pizza and Tony's Pizza Palace.



Piccolo Pizza

Piccolo's used their own methods to make grinders. Kathy Case-Driscoll of Windsor Locks remembers that they hollowed out the bread in order to put the meatballs in. Piccolo's was near Tanya's Pizza Palace, where the Double Tree hotel is now (2016). You are probably getting the idea by now that there were a number of pizza places in close proximity.

The first Yellow Pages ad below I could find for Piccolo was in 1972. There was another of their Yellow Pages ads in 1978. I did not have access to later phone books. So Piccolo's probably began in the early 1970s. It was still in business in 1978, but I could find no information as to when it closed.



On April 14, 2008, BusinessWest.com did an article on Domenico Piccolo and his son, Guy. It said that in the early 1970, Domenico Piccolo, a “long-time owner of Piccolo’s Pizza in Windsor Locks” bought a lot of land near Bradley Field, in hopes of relocating his restaurant and lowering overhead. This gives a hint that in the early 1970s, Piccolo Pizza had already been around for a while. The article goes on to say that the land he bought was never used for relocating the restaurant, but rather was used for the airport parking venture that his son, Guy, started and built. That investment did well.

Kelly Savery of Windsor Locks remembered that the owner of Piccolo's would get a couple guys to lift her Dad in his wheelchair up the steps so they could dine in, and he always gave them quarters for the pinball machine!

H&M Pizza and Giant Grinder Shop

The Hartford Courant of Jan. 7, 2002 did an excellent article on the H&M Pizza and Giant Grinder Shop, and its owner, Mahmoud (Moe) Hussein. Moe and his father-in-law opened his original shop in 1972 in a rented storefront on Spring Street. It was a classic pizza and grinder shop. It was a small and unassuming building, but the pizzas and the grinders were very large and very good. The first time I went there, I got a pastrami grinder that could have fed three hungry men. I was hooked.

In 2003, Moe moved his business to a larger lot beside his original store. The new store has room for about 50 customers. He bought that lot in about 1980, with the intention of expanding his business. He was thinking ahead. From the start, it was a family business, with the whole family pitching in. Moe, who grew up in Jerusalem, immigrated to Connecticut when he was 17. He wears a constant smile.

The new store has an expanded menu. In addition to the giant pizzas and grinders, Moe serves a number of Italian-style meals and salads. H&M doesn’t disappoint. The

next three photos show: the original H&M Pizza and Giant Grinder store, the new store, and the interior of the new store.

Kelly Savery of Windsor Locks remembered that and that Windsor Locks Little League teams often celebrated the end of a season with a Party Pizza from H&M. She said that one ham grinder could feed you for a week.



H&M Pizza and Giant Grinder Shop - the original store - 1972



The new H&M Pizzeria and Giant Grinder shop - 2003
490 Spring St., Windsor Locks, Conn.



Interior of the new H&M Pizza and Giant Grinder shop

The Second Poquonock Giant Grinder and Pizza Shop

Fazza Saleh opened a pizzeria in Poquonock in 1969, after he got back from his military service in Vietnam. In 1975, he opened the Second Poquonock Pizza and Giant Grinder Shop at 75 Old County Road in Windsor Locks. It was and remains a family operation. The pizzas that you get at the Second Poquonock Pizza and Giant Grinder Shop are big and thick. Their Party Pizza was one of the largest pizzas I had ever seen. Their grinders are enormous, as you can see in the photo below. The food from Second Poquonock is always a party favorite. It is rare that anyone is surprised by the name of a pizza shop, but "Second Poquonock Giant Grinder and Pizza Shop" gets your attention. If you go to Second Poquonock during lunch, you can find a long line. It's a great place to stop in for just a slice and a coke, as well as to get ready for a party.

Kelly Savery of Windsor Locks remembered that Fazza is well known for making wonderful fried dough at the annual Fireman's carnival.



Second Poquonock's Giant Italian Grinder



Second Poquonock Giant Grinder and Pizza Shop
75 Old County Road, Windsor Locks, Conn



Interior of Second Poquonock Giant Grinder and Pizza Shop

The Pizza Parlor Restaurant

Gus Kostantakis opened the Pizza Parlor Restaurant back in 1975. It is at 225 Main St. in the little shopping center, across from where the old Post Office used to be. Kelly Savery of Windsor Locks remembered that the Pizza Parlor was once located across the street for many years, and was owned by someone else before Gus. Lynne LaChance Solak remembered that the previous owners were George and Kaye Bonatsakis. That would make it one of the earliest pizza and grinder shops in Windsor Locks. Kelly also remembered that Gus would also let local teenagers fold boxes in exchange for a soda and chips.



The Pizza Parlor Restaurant is not just a pizza shop. It is a full-service, full-menu restaurant with daily specials. The pizzas are excellent. If you check the websites such as Trip Advisor, and you find that the Pizza Parlor gets excellent reviews. As with the other pizza places in Windsor Locks, low prices and good food are the reasons for its longevity. It's a nice place to go for a family gathering or with a group of friends. They can easily handle groups of 15 with only a days notice. Here is an ad taken from a Windsor Locks phone directory of the 1970s. Below are an ad for the Pizza Parlor from the 1978 Yellow Pages, and photographs of the exterior and interior of the store.



Pizza Parlor Restaurant, 255 Main St., Windsor Locks, Conn - Since 1975



Interior of the Pizza Parlor Restaurant

Pizza House (Warehouse Point)

While this article is on the early Pizza and Grinder shops of Windsor Locks, it is appropriate to mention the Pizza House, which is located just across the river, in Warehouse Point. It used to be where the Main Fish Market now is, and it was owned and operated by the father of the family who now runs the Fish Market. Folks from Windsor Locks still have good memories of the Pizza House. The ad below is from the Windsor Locks Yellow Pages of 1972.

PIZZA HOUSE

OPEN
7 DAYS
A WEEK

BRIDGE STREET • WAREHOUSE POINT
CHARLES DESPOTERIS, PROP.

PIZZA	HOT OVEN GRINDERS	
Plain	Regular	Cold Beer
Mozzarella	Sausage	Spaghetti - Shells
Sausage	Meatball	Antipasto - Lasagna
Meatball	Capicola	ASK ABOUT OUR SPECIAL
Anchovies	Genoa Salami	GROUP AND PARTY PRICES
Mushrooms	Virginia Ham	WAREHOUSE POINT
Onions	Cheese	Windsor Locks 623-0525
Green Peppers	Pastrami	
Hamburg	Roast Beef	

Years in which ads for stores appeared in Yellow Pages

To get a better idea of when the Pizza and Grinder shops were in business, I found some Windsor Locks telephone books, and checked to see if the stores had advertisements in the Yellow Pages. I was only able to locate phone books for six years: 1956, 1957, 1967, 1970, 1973 and 1978. While it would have been better to have the Windsor Locks phone books for every year from 1950 to the present day, the five years that I found cover the range of years in which the early pizza and grinder shops opened.

The following spreadsheet shows the years that each of the Pizza and Grinder shops of Windsor Locks had advertisements in the six Windsor Locks Yellow Pages that I had access to.

	1956	1957	1967	1970	1973	1978
Frank's	X	X	X	X	X	
Tommy's	X	X	X			
Shonty's	X	X	X			
Bridge View	X	X	X	X	X	
Teddy's		X	X			
AD's			X	X	X	X
Tony's				X		
Piccolo's				X	X	X
Pizza House				X	X	X
Tanya's					X	X
H&M						X
2nd Poquonock						X
Pizza Parlor						X

Since all pizza and grinder shops depend heavily on their carry-out business, we can feel confident that this spreadsheet which shows when they were running ads in the Yellow Pages is accurate. Obviously, it would be more precise if we had the Yellow Pages for all years, but that was not possible.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the first pizza and grinder shops came to Windsor Locks in the 1950s. At first, you could get pizza and grinders at full service restaurants. Then came the specialty shops which focussed on pizza and grinders. Some of the early pizza and grinder shops of Windsor Locks lasted a long time. AD's, the Second Poquonock, H&M, and the Pizza Parlor are all still going strong as of this writing in 2016. AD's and H&M replaced their initial shops with larger quarters and expanded menus. The citizens of Windsor Locks have had a long love affair with Pizza and Grinder shops. Why not? They are comfort foods that can be enjoyed out or at home without having to dress up to go out. The service at these locally owned, locally operated shops can't be beat, and the prices are very reasonable.

There were two "centers" of the pizza and grinder business in Windsor Locks. One was Main Street. The other was Turnpike Road, also known as Route 75 and the Ella Grasso Turnpike. Main St. had AD's original store, Shonty's, Teddy's, the Bridge View Restaurant and the Pizza Parlor. Turnpike Road had Tonya's, Piccolo's, Tommy's, Tony's, and Frank's. Of course, in between Main St. and Turnpike Rd, there are three heavy hitters in the pizza and grinder trade: AD's, H&M, and Second Poquonock.

In the Introduction, we saw that pizza and grinders is not just Italian foods. They are international phenomena. As we looked at the pizza shops of Windsor Locks, we see that the pizza and grinder entrepreneurs were ethnically diverse, which is as it should be. Windsor Locks is a town of immigrants, and it was some of those immigrants and their families who built and operated our pizza and grinder shops.

Ideas for this article were actively discussed on Facebook's private group page named "You know you're from Windsor Locks when". A number of the members of this group provided information, photos, and suggestions. Without their help, this article would not have been possible. The members who provided ideas include: Kat Arbacheski, Lisa Bellinger, Robert Butryman, Lisa Mund Calsetta, Kathy Case-Driscoll, Carol Gagnon, Justine Gamache, Judy Greene Cyr, Shirley Diane, Mickey Danyluk, Kathy Case-Driscoll, Lori DeLuco Deleel, Susan Famiglietti, Larry Ferrari, Alyson Gray, Harvey Jacobson, Rose Anderson Johnson, Celeste Gail Jordan, Joseph McGloin, Gerry Morel, Lee Valbona Moule, Bob Rossi, Karen Pappa, Kimberly Avery Pease, Michael Persuitte, Debbie Hinkley Pham, Donna M. Phillips, Chet Pohorylo, Jim Roche, Mary-Sue Ruiter, Kelly Savery, Carol Schwarz, Lynn LaChance Solak, Nancy Rosa Willard, and Lee Ruggiero Zononi. I thank them sincerely for their help.

Finally I thank the reader for making it all the way through this article. Please pass it to anyone you think might be interested.

Mel Montemerlo

