

Tripoli's owner 'pleasantly overwhelmed' at new Methuen shop

For months, the whispers persisted about the possibility of a legendary pizza and bakery shop landing at the Howe Street Superette.

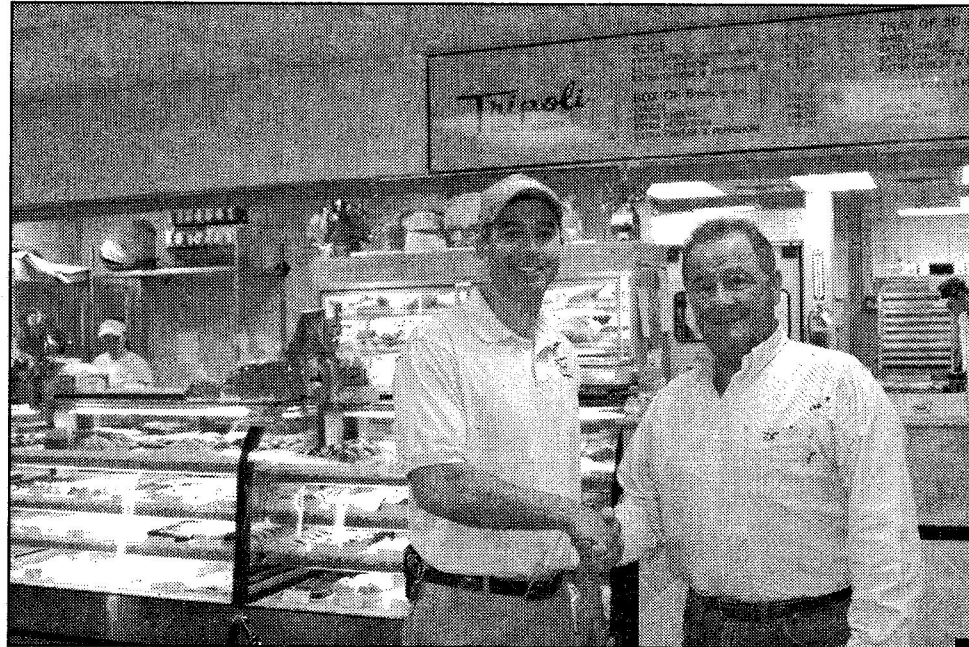
The store's owner Gary Hammond tried to keep it secret, even sidetracking rumors with a hint of a barbecue joint moving in.

Then the well-known yellow sign with black lettering went up last month and excitement burst through the dam.

"After the sign went up one Friday night we had 50 phone calls asking if Tripoli was open," said Hammond, who has owned the store since January 1986. "Everyone is happy that there's a Tripoli in Methuen."

Seven days a week Tripoli makes fresh square pizza, calzones, and meat and spinach pies right there at its new Methuen location. Twice a day, pastries and bread are delivered from the original Lawrence bakery. Tripoli's shops are also located in North Andover, Salisbury and Seabrook, N.H.

"We're pleasantly overwhelmed," grinned Matthew Zappala, a fourth-generation Tripoli owner who oversaw the expansion into Methuen. "Our fan base rallied. We have longtime faithful patrons whose grandparents may have taken them



Fourth-generation Tripoli owner Matthew Zappala and Howe Street Superette owner Gary Hammond shake on a deal that, in just a few short weeks, has worked very well for both businesses.

(to Tripoli's) at the beach and they passed it on. That's kept us going."

The most popular items vary from location to location, but here in Methuen the top

four are pizza, bread, cheesecake and the pastry that goes by the name lobster tails.

Matthew and his brother Andrew's great-grandparents, Rose and Rosario, took over an existing bakery in 1924. They used baking sheets to make pizza. When a slightly sweet tomato sauce and fresh toppings were added, people flocked to Common Street and later, the other locations, for the delicious alternative to traditional round pizza.

Matthew's dad Rosario lives in Methuen and is still very active in the business.

"(Gary) presented opportunities over the years to my dad, but we couldn't work it out," explained Matt Zappala. "Then he gave us an offer that we couldn't refuse. It's been a very positive response; the customers are great."

He explained the keys to Tripoli's suc-

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cess.

"People know us for being consistent with our products for a long time. We make pizza fresh to order. Everything is done by hand, old school and that means more labor and time consuming," said Zappala, adding this is the first of their shops to set up inside an operating business.

"It's been a very positive experience operating in Methuen; there have been a lot of new faces," he said, just

weeks into the opening.

For Hammond, who has witnessed pharmacies evolving into convenience stores, adding Tripoli to his operation was ideal.

"You need to have a diversified business, not just a sub shop. They offer bread, pizza and desserts. They're good all day long, not just at lunch and supper. I always wanted some kind of bakery and bread in a residential neighborhood."



Matthew Zappala displays a tray of strawberry shortcakes above the case filled with treats.



Alisha Bourne (left) and manager Lorientne Lu stock fresh-baked bread onto racks at the new Tripoli bakery and pizza at the Howe Street Superette.