

The Pie's the Limit

Local, Organic Pizza Comes to Swanzey

By Becky Karush



Think of Swanzey and what comes to mind?

The town's oxen mascots, Monadnock Regional High School, and maybe a covered bridge or two.

How about organic pizza topped with locally grown fresh vegetables (served in recyclable containers with compostable utensils), handmade by kind and cheerful people dedicated to their community?

That's exactly what the new Hillside Pizza, located on Route 32 in front of Arnone's Family Fun Center, is bringing to the Monadnock Region.

"We're here for Swanzey, here for Keene and all the surrounding towns," says managing partner-chef Lynn Washburn. "We believe in using the best ingredients to make delicious pizzas that people love, and being the kind of place that feeds the well-being of the whole community."

A Pizza History

Washburn and fellow manager-chefs Tommy Roth and Jack Lindner are working from a strong tradition of organic, local food and community involvement. The Swanzey restaurant is actually the third in the Hillside family of pizzerias; the first to open was in South Deerfield, Mass.

The idea started in 2001 when Western Massachusetts farmer Bob Lindner (Jack's father) and businessman Craig White teamed up to start a fundraising business. The mission was to create organic frozen pizzas for area fundraising groups—schools, churches, sports teams and nonprofits—to sell.

But once people tasted the pizza, they wanted more. Heeding popular demand, the pair opened a South Deerfield pizzeria in 2006, and three years later created a second shop in Hadley, Mass. Both locations serve as production sites for the fundraising work and as a restaurant three or four days a week.

"Word just sort of spread," says Bob Lindner.

Soon, schools and sports clubs in Brattleboro, Vermont and throughout the Monadnock Region also wanted to sell Hillside pizzas to raise money.



(L-R) Managing partner-chefs Jack Lindner, Lynn Washburn, and Tommy Roth

"We knew we wanted to grow the business and we had these great connections to Keene. Folks were coming all the way (from Keene) to Deerfield to get the pizzas!" says Lindner.

The fundraising venture has been hugely successful: to date, participating groups in the tri-state area (Mass., N.H. and Vt.) have raised more than \$175,000 for their projects.

So the business pair asked their old friends and colleagues, Lynn Washburn and Tommy Roth, to take the lead on the New Hampshire restaurant.

A Family Atmosphere

"The most important thing to us is to respond to what the Keene area wants," says Washburn, who moved to the Keene area from Rhode Island to help start the pizzeria. "The menu will always reflect what people here like, what grows here, what people produce locally—from the pizza toppings to the beer and bread to the artwork on the walls."

Roth nods in agreement and points to the three-quarter wall between the dining area and the kitchen.

"Customers can look over and say 'hello' as we're working, tell us when something's awesome or needs tweaking," he says. "Maybe we'll put in televisions if people want to watch Sunday ball games here! It's a family atmosphere, where the place belongs to everybody."

Their zeal for all things local—from tomatoes to friendships—fits well with the needs of the Monadnock Region, remarks Susan Newcomer, workforce coordinator for the Greater Keene Chamber of Commerce.

"We are unique in the state," says Newcomer.

Because the region is somewhat geographically isolated and doesn't draw a high number of tourists, small businesses must collaborate, even as they compete, on how best to serve the people who live here, she says. Strong local bonds among businesses, and between businesses and residents, are essential to sustain the health of the community as a whole.

“Lynn and Tommy joined the Chamber right away, saying they wanted to be a part of this community and use a lot of local products. They wanted to see how they could form relationships with other businesses,” says Newcomer.

“We live here now! It’s our home, too,” says Roth, who moved to the Keene area from Massachusetts. “And people have been so welcoming. There’s really something special going on here.”



Managing partner-chef Jack Lindner serves up a hot Mount Monadnock pizza

Hillside Pizza has zeal for all things local—from tomatoes to friendships.

fundraising program, which includes “Take & Bake” frozen pizzas and “Scoop & Bake” frozen cookie dough.

In order to open in January, the manager-chefs had to get their organic produce from a large regional distributor. However, the goal is to buy as many ingredients as they can from local sources.

“We can’t wait to start making connections with farmers and see what we can get out of the ground,” says Washburn. “We want to use as many local purveyors as we can.”

Already, the restaurant has developed a vendor relationship with Orchard Hill Breadworks in Alstead to supply bread. Says Orchard Hill owner, Noah Elbers: “One of my delivery people was in Hannah Grimes Marketplace or Blueberry Fields, and Lynn happened to be there. She just saw the bread, I got a call from her not long after,” he says. “That’s how most new accounts start, actually—serendipity.”

“It’s a wonderful feeling to make this great, healthy food and use it to help the community,” Washburn says.

Roth grins. “And, man, it tastes really, really good.” 🍕

Becky Karush is a writer, gardener, and duck owner in Swanzey.

Hillside Pizza • 471 Old Homestead Highway • Swanzey, NH • (603) 325-8411
Hours: Open Thurs., Fri., and Sat. 11 am–9 pm and Sun. 11 am–8 pm

Eating is Believing

The best way to experience that special-ness is to bite into a hot Hillside Pizza pie.

“The Mount Monadnock (pizza) is awesome,” says Washburn; this made-for-the-region specialty pie is topped with asiago almond pesto, spinach, portobello mushrooms and mozzarella cheese. In addition to specialty pies, such as the Mount Monadnock, customers can build their own pizzas with a variety of tomato and pesto sauces, fresh vegetables and free range, preservative-free meats. The restaurant also serves frozen pizzas, large slices, wraps and organic salads.

Hillside’s catering operation is also in full swing, as is the

Photos: Bob Audette

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