

ELK RAPIDS NEWS

June 23
2022

Volume XVII
Issue No. 5
75¢



Serving up tradition

BY BARB MOSHER, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

There will never be another Chef Charles. The Elk Rapids community came to that woeful conclusion as word quickly spread of the untimely death late last November of the beloved local restaurateur. But thanks to his longtime friend and fellow chef Dan Rowe, Charles Egeler's legacy and legendary pizza will live on.



Chef Dan Rowe preps a pizza in the kitchen of Chef Charles Pizzeria.. Photos by Barb Mosher



Business partners John Conrad and Chef Dan Rowe are ready to continue the legacy of Chef Charles Pizza.

"We aren't changing anything," said Dan who, along with business partner John Conrad, plans a late June reopening of Chef Charles Pizzeria. "Same name, same basic menu, same recipes, same ingredients. We're very excited to continue his legacy. Why change what was so good?"

Dan fondly recalls getting to know Charles when Charles and his brother David bought the former Pizza Port 29 years ago and transformed it into an iconic gourmet pizza and sandwich shop. "My friends and I hung out here, and he'd let us run up a tab, but never more than \$20," he said, sitting inside the restaurant's dining area. "And I saw him the day before he died, talked to him right out back here."

Dan's well prepared to step into the hallowed ground of Chef Charles' kitchen. He attended the Traverse Bay Area Career Tech Center culinary program in high school and has been a line cook and bartender at Pearl's New Orleans Kitchen and the Town Club, both in Elk Rapids. He's also served as kitchen manager at Red Mesa Grill in Boyne City.

Spending the last ten years as an insurance adjuster, Dan's thrilled to be back in culinary and eager to dig his hands and heart into the dough and toppings that made Chef Charles' "pizza with pizzazz" a favorite of locals and visitors for nearly three decades. While customers may notice a few cosmetic changes including a poured epoxy floor, fresh paint, and new tabletops, the familiar and comfortable local vibe remains. He's even keeping the menu boards which feature Charles' own handwriting.

"We could have made this into something else," Dan said, surveying the interior of the River Street pizzeria, "but when John (Conrad) approached me and asked what kind of restaurant concept I wanted, I said 'the Chef Charles Pizza concept.' Why ruin a good thing? Everyone knows and loves it."

Dan plans to turn out pizzas, salads, and sandwiches seven days a week, year-round (summer hours 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday; 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Sundays). Social media will be coming soon, and those who have the original landline phone number emblazoned in their mind will be glad to know it hasn't changed either: 231-264-8901.

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