

# Fresh dough

## Pizzeria offers customers pizzas to bake at home

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In 1990, the television show "Seinfeld" aired its fourth episode, "Male Unbonding," in which the character Kramer proposes a chain of pizza restaurants where customers make their own pizza pies.

"You can't just have people shoving their arms into 600 degree ovens," his friend George objects in the episode.

"It'll all be supervised!" Kramer responds to laughs.

While meant as a joke, perhaps Kramer was onto something more than a decade ago, as pizza chains today such as Papa Murphy's and Nick-N-Willy's thrive on the custom-made pizza premise.

Papa Murphy's is a privately held company started in 1995 by Terry Collins, who merged Murphy's Pizza and Papa Aldo's Pizza.

Today, Papa Murphy's International operates and franchises more than 1,000 of its take-and-bake pizza restaurants, making it the fifth-largest pizza chain in the United States.

Loveland has been home to Papa Murphy's since 1997, when Leslee and John Sobraske opened a franchise on Eisenhower Boulevard and Jefferson Avenue.

While that location closed in 2004, the Sobraskes opened their current store at 1131 Eagle Drive in 2001, and Leslee said they plan to open a new store somewhere along Eisenhower by the end of the year.

Each restaurant offers fresh-made pizzas customers can customize to

take and bake at home.

"This town is getting too big for just one (Papa Murphy's)," Leslee said. "We will be the only town this size in Colorado to have two."

According to Papa Murphy's Web site, 98 percent of its stores are franchised, lending to the company's rapid growth.

Leslee said the Northern Colorado's take-and-bake market is exploding, as Loveland, Fort Collins and Greeley locations continually lead sales in the mountain region.

"Corporate is always looking because they know Northern Colorado is just taking off with take-and-bake," Leslee said.

With the rise in popularity, a Nick-N-Willy's, 1433 Denver Ave., opens Oct. 27.

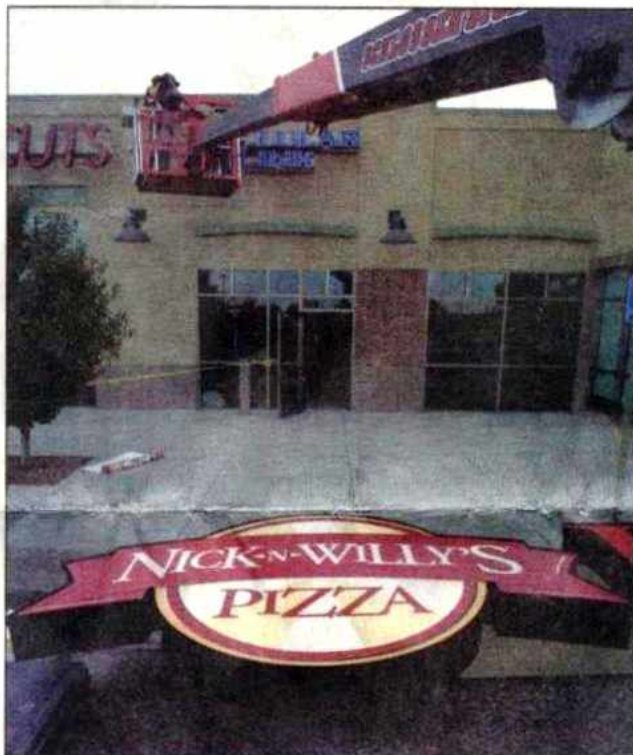
The take-and-bake pizza company, founded in 1989 in Boulder, will be Loveland's, and Colorado's, first Nick-N-Willy's with a full restaurant and wood-burning oven.

Originally, Nick-N-Willy's offered custom-made pizzas that customers baked at home.

Today, it provides customers an option of eating at the store or at home. With locations in 17 states, and six states opening new stores, Nick-N-Willy's is cashing in on the take-and-bake craze.

"Our product speaks for itself," said Bonnie Gibbons, co-owner.

In a world where Pizza Hut's and Domino's promise of quick delivery to your doorstep dominates the pizza market, how did companies that require the customer cook the pizza themselves become successful?



Andrew Carder with Schlosser Signs Inc. prepares to hang the new Nick-N-Willy's Pizza sign at their store Wednesday.

Leslee said it is a matter of quality ingredients and affordable prices.

"I don't even think we really compete with delivery," said Leslee, whose restaurant is adjacent to a Domino's. "People who want delivery are just a totally different market."

The line out the door every Friday at Papa Murphy's indicates customers don't mind going to the effort of driving to the store and cooking the pizza themselves.

Dan Gibbons, co-owner of Nick-N-Willy's, said convenience and homemade ingredients are key to the new restaurant.

Bob Rowe, 76, of Loveland gets his Mediterranean chicken pizza exclusively from Papa Murphy's because of the convenience.

"I like it because we can cook it whenever we are ready to eat it," Rowe said. "I'm familiar with them."

The proposition of two additional take-and-bake

restaurants in an already crowded pizza market doesn't seem to bother owners.

Leslee said she considers Nick-N-Willy's more of a restaurant than take-and-bake, and Bonnie said once people try their pies they will taste the difference.

The taste is the reason Joe Benenate, 72, of Loveland buys take-and-bake pizza from Papa Murphy's.

"I like their pizza," Benenate said. "The quality they have make real good pizzas."

### RI TAKE-N-BAKE FACTS

- In the U.S., pizza accounts for \$40 billion in sales annually.
- Ninety-three percent of Americans eat at least one pizza per month.
- Pizza Marketing Quarterly deemed take-and-bake "the next mega-trend in pizza."

Sources: Pizza Today, Parade Magazine, Pizza Marketing Quarterly, Summer, 2001.