



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BUCKLER

Working man: Ronald Hancock hasn't lost his touch. The president and founder of Papa Romano's started spinning pizza pies way back in 1965.

Papa Romano's

He's gone from delivery boy to company owner

BY PAT MURPHY
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In the highly competitive pizza business, Papa Romano's isn't a giant like Domino's or Little Caesars.

But Ronald Hancock, who founded Papa Romano's in Oakland County, likes it that way. "We'll never be a national chain," he said. "We're happy being a regional operation with a very good product."

Customers had a chance to sample that product Wednesday, when Papa Romano's commemorated its 30th anniversary in southeast Michigan. All 72 outlets provided a "big slice" — a new menu item — free of charge during the lunch hour.

■ 'Our niche (and reason for repeat customers) is taking care of the individual customer with the best product possible.'

Ronald Hancock
—Papa Romano's founder

"It's our way of celebrating," said Hancock, who opened the first Papa Romano's at Nine Mile and Telegraph in Southfield. Since then the franchise operation has expanded throughout metro Detroit, with outlets in Grand Rapids and Holland.

Expansion, however, is not what Papa Romano's is all about, insisted Hancock. "Our niche (and reason for repeat customers) is taking care of the

individual customer with the best product possible."

While that principle may sound like a cliché, Hancock said it's the primary reason he stayed in the business long enough to go from delivery boy to pizza tycoon — even if he's not in the same league as Tom Monaghan or Mike Ilitch.

"I've met them both," said Hancock, a Northville resident, "and I admire what they did. But



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ROMANO'S PIZZERIA

30924 Grand River

GR. 4-7600

That was then: This ad from the 1965 Farmington High School yearbook shows Ron Hancock in his younger days.

they are in a different league — I'll never own a sports franchise."

Hancock's got his first taste of the pizza business in the early

1960s, while he was a student at Farmington High School. He was a delivery boy for Romano's Pizza at Grand River and Nine Mile — then owned by his men-

tor, Jerry Missel, a school teacher.

"At that time, pizza houses opened at 4 p.m.," said Hancock.

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