

Family pizza business is slice of life

BY JOANNE MALISZEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

A framed photograph of an attractive young woman sits in a frame atop the refrigerated case counter in Jim Schenk's pizza shop.

"What are you selling now . . . picture frames?" Schenk, 20, has been asked. Others just assume the woman in the picture is one of those nameless models whose picture is in every frame you buy.

"Oh, that's my wife. I think she's beautiful. I'm proud of her," said Schenk, owner of The Original Maude's Gourmet Pizza in Nielson's Plaza on Orchard Lake Road, north of Grand River.

The Harrison High School graduate knows the counter isn't where most husbands put their wife's picture. But Schenk does things his own way. And that's just fine with him.

He maintains that same attitude with the pizza shop once owned by his parents that he bought back from other owners not too long ago. "I want it the same way as when my mom and dad had it for years," Schenk said, referring to the shop that stood for a decade in the Bel-Aire shopping center at 10 Mile and Orchard Lake roads.

That means the old-fashioned way. To Schenk, that means homemade food versus institutional. That means no conveyor belt for the pizza. And it means cornmeal. That's right, cornmeal. "I cook the pizza in cornmeal. It gives a definite flavor. It's an old-fashioned pizza."

When you open a box of Maude's pizza, you'll have cornmeal all over and no screen marks on the pizza, Schenk said.

And just like his mom used to make, Maude's also offers pies, elephant ears, ribs, chicken, pasta, fish, submarine sandwiches and other desserts. "We make everything ourselves."

Another tradition begun with his mom Dorothy — she calls Schenk "boss" — who does the baking and pretty much keeps the place going. The one thing he isn't doing that his mom did is have a meat market-deli. There's too much competition in that regard what with chain supermarkets, he said.

Entrepreneurship isn't some-



SHARON LEMIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Old-fashioned pizza: Jim Schenk, owner of The Original Maude's Gourmet Pizza on Orchard Lake Road, is following in the footsteps of his parents, who originally owned the shop.

thing new to the 20-year-old. He's been in the pizza business — so to speak — since he was 9. Right after school, Schenk was at Maude's (really his mom's nickname). "I used to sleep out on a freezer when I got tired."

Working and making his own way is just something that's always been important to Schenk, who will soon be a father. "I have never worked less than 70 hours a week. I have to work a lot of hours to be comfortable."

Pizza isn't his only domain, however. Schenk also runs a vending machine business. So far he supplies six soda pop machines. In the winter, he's in the snow-plowing business.

"I learned the knack of business and making money," Schenk said. "My mom says I'm just like my dad. He was a millionaire twice, lost it twice and was almost back."

When he graduated high school, he intended to join his father in the construction business. He started his career in that field driving a semi-trailer truck. Four months later, however, his father died.

"I didn't know what to do," Schenk said, adding that without his father's know-how to help him, he decided on a new course.

The pizza business is tough, Schenk said. But he believes he will be successful. In fact, he's al-

ready set a goal of maybe five or six Maude's pizza shops, all of which he intends to maintain as old-fashioned pizza parlors.

"I want it to be a kind of mom and pop kind of place. I think people are tired of chain food. Mom and pop pizzas are the one's that taste good," Schenk said.

But he wants his customers to realize that old-fashioned takes time. He doesn't operate a production line. "It takes a good 15 minutes to cook the pizza."

And when he's accomplished his business goals, Schenk says he'll probably go back to school. "I've always wanted to be a Farmington Hills police officer."

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Court trims back landscaping project

The city of Birmingham gave the lost go-ahead needed for a judicial consent judgment that will draw the reins on a landscaping project that has upset homeowners on Southfield Road for nearly six years.

As a result, neighbors on Southfield Road will see that landscaping project reduced — including removal of dirt.

City attorney Robert Shuman

will take the city's resolution to Oakland Circuit Judge Robert Sosnick this week to cement the agreement that calls for Patrick Giannotta to complete a revamped landscaping project within the next 60 days.

"The main points are that the cement walls currently on the property will be reduced to a maximum height of four feet (and) 2,300 cubic yards of fill will be re-

moved," Shuman reported.

All fill and cement walls must be hauled away outside of the Birmingham city limits.

Commissioner Randolph Judd questioned whether the completion of the project will indeed happen and asked what safeguards were built in.

"The judgment says that if the work isn't completed in 60 days then (the city) can go on the prop-

erty and complete the work," Shuman explained. "The real bottom line protection is that we'll have the ability to take the property. The judgment is very specific about the work."

Even with the safeguards, Judd wasn't convinced that the matter will be wrapped up by the end of December. "This will require some heavy duty monitoring."

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