

BLUE BELL JOURNAL

Cheese optional for Tony A's Smile

BY K. ANNE FOX

For the Blue Bell Journal

WHITPAIN — The only thing good about the Sixers-Celtics playoff game Sunday was the pizza from Tony A's.

Who is Tony A?

He is Tony Altomare, who owns and operates the pizza place in the Center Square Shopping Center. He has been there for a little over a year, and the pizza is catching on as it has at his other locations, in Roxborough, and Conshohocken.

Altomare grew up in Philadelphia's East Falls neighborhood, went to Roman Catholic High School in Center City and graduated from West Chester University. He started out life as a financial consultant and, before the stock market started to slide, he got out of the world of trading and went into the pizza business on City Avenue with a friend from Italy.

Business was good, and Altomare learned about dough and tomato sauce and toppings. Soon he was ready to branch out on his own, first in Wayne, out of the Main Line, and then in 1999, with the opening of two stores, in Conshohocken and Roxborough.

Altomare struggled with

Altomare's pizzeria finds a home in Center Square Plaza Shopping Center

a name for the business, and then his family convinced him — hey it's Tony A's, his nickname from childhood.

"Never did like the name as a kid, really didn't want it as a name for my pizza places, but my family is right: It works," he said.

He was in the process of installing a new gourmet kitchen in his Maple Glen home, shopping at the kitchen store at Skippack Pike and Route 202, when he first became aware of the Center Square Shopping Center.

"I said to myself — now, that place is screaming for a Tony A's. I checked it out as soon as I could," he said. "Absolutely no stores were available. I had to wait a few years for a place to open up. I am where the video store was."

This is a busy night for Altomare, He works fast as he talks.

"Tonight is St. Helenas's night," he said. "Just like I do for a church in Roxborough, I worked out a fund-raiser with St. Helena's. For all the pizza ordered by families from the church, I give back 10 percent to the parish.

"It's a good deal all around. Good for me — I

"A secret to pizza is not to have a dough that gets soggy on the way home"

Tony Altomare
Owner of Tony A's

get out in the community, people get to know my product — and they get paid back for their business.

The menu is large and varied. There is take-out and delivery, and you can have lunch or dinner in any one of the 85 seats in the restaurant.

There are nine kinds of white pie, ranging from Campagnola (broccoli, sun dried tomatoes, spinach, mushrooms and mozzarella cheese) to The Conshohocken (eggplant, broccoli-rabe, mozzarella, topped with plum tomato sauce).

And 26 kinds of specialty pies are featured: The Blue Bell is topped with grilled chicken, roasted peppers, spinach and mozzarella cheese. The Tomato Pie is Tony A's favorite. It is his special sauce made of plum tomatoes, fresh garlic,

basil, olive oil and oregano and sprinkled with grated Parmesan. Customers can create their own pizzas from a whole menu of toppings.

"My crust is the best," said Tony. "The dough is simple, consistent and it is baked in special brick ovens until crispier than most. A secret to pizza is not to have a dough that gets soggy on the way home. We just won a Chestnut Hill Local award for the best pizza in the area.

In addition to pizza, there are baked calzone, strombolis, Tony A. wraps, steak sandwiches, chicken steaks, hot subs, hamburgers, specialty hot sandwiches, cold sandwiches and several different pasta dishes. There are also Italianos — sausages, chicken, a cheese steak or veggies served on an Italian roll with sharp provolone and broccoli-rabe.

Also available is a long list of salads, finger foods, and in one corner of the menu, a Kid's Corner — smaller portions for a smaller price.

Tony A's is open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. during the week. On Friday and Saturday, it's open from 10 a.m. until 11 p.m. and Sunday hours are from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. For more information, call 610-278-7500.