

Upper Merion Small Business Spotlight Peppers by Amedeo's

By Dawn Lindberg – Upper Merion Economic and Community Development Committee

“We love Upper Merion!” was the first comment I received as I sat down to chat with two of the owners of Peppers by Amedeo's, Carmela and Anthony Zelli. That feeling was the consistent theme throughout our 45 minutes together.

Peppers Italian Restaurant has been a staple in Upper Merion for decades. The Zelli's purchased it from the original owners in February of 2020. Within six weeks, they were faced with the challenge of the COVID pandemic. Their priority was to retain as many employees as they could and find a way to serve customers. They ran the business out of tents for 18 months with never having a thought of giving up. “This is our home. Our entire family is in the area. We attended the Upper Merion schools. We were driven to keep Peppers open for the community” they explained. Three and a half years later they are pleased with the results of their dedication. “Things are running smoothly now, and we are catching our breath a bit” they shared.

Once they emerged from COVID, they turned their attention to refreshing the menu with new entrees and new beverages. They wanted to keep the offerings fresh and are always looking to meet diners' needs via vegetarian and gluten-free dishes. The menu is robust and diverse. It includes everything you would expect from an Italian venue as well as Philly favorite cheese steak, fish and chips, seafood, roast pork, burgers, salads, and so much more. Literally, something for everyone.

When asked about advertising, the Zelli's commented “We don't. We would much rather direct our money towards giving back to the community than spend it on advertising.” And they do give back! As an example, support is provided to school district fund raising, sponsorship of sports teams, and township fundraising. They embrace hiring high school students. Not just for them to earn money but to provide them with mentorship on the responsibilities and experience of having a job. “Staff is family here. We want them to love working here” they explained.

As to their management style the goal is to be visible and friendly. Both Anthony and Carmela are “out on the floor” greeting customers by name, supporting their employees, and ensuring that everyone is happy. The friendliness expands beyond the walls of the restaurant. They are friendly with many other establishments in Upper Merion. “We don't see them as competition but as family. We help each other out by lending inventory; like you borrow a cup of sugar from your neighbor. We support each other during tough times like Covid.”

My last question sought advice for others who would like to enter the restaurant business. They both laughed and said, “Don't do it!” They quickly responded with “the most valuable thing to give to this occupation is your heart.” It is so clear to me that Carmela and Anthony give their heart and soul to Peppers and to Upper Merion. I'm looking forward to my next dinner at Peppers by Amedeo's.

Peppers is located at 175 Town Center Road. A full description of their offerings and services is available at peppersitalianrestaurantandbar.com

