

Kevin Kenealy
Contributor

Westchester's Paul's Pizza and Hot Dog just celebrated its 30-year anniversary this past Sept. 22 and after visiting the 31st and Wolf establishment, it's easy to see why the business is able to keep going.

"Excellent food, always tastes good, always plenty of it, service is fast," said Western Springs resident Rich Ricar. Rich and Kathy Ricar said they have been visiting Paul's for 19 years and said they appreciate the people behind the counter and the quality of the food.

The Karavitis family from Westchester has been visiting Paul's for about five years and was also pleased with their dinner. Ann Karavitis' children Angie and Torie both enjoyed the food and service.

"I like the food," said Angie, who said the chili cheese dog is good. "I like the service and how the people you order to are really nice," said Torie, whose favorite is the pizza.

Owner and Westchester village trustee Paul Gattuso was presented with a plaque at the village board meeting Sept. 25, commemorating the restaurant's 30 years. Gattuso said he knew he wanted his own restaurant by the time he was 14, when he worked in his aunt's restaurant, Ambrogio's Restaurant, at Belmont and Oak Park in Chicago.

His aunt, Angela Ambrogio, was there to see Paul accept the plaque and later commented on his time starting in the restaurant business.

"He would do everything. He was a bus boy, a cook; he'd make pizza. He'd be on my side all the time, learning," Ambrogio said.

Five years after working for his aunt, Paul bought his first restaurant when he was 19 and then sold that store to buy Paul's Pizza on Sept. 22, 1982. For 19 years, Paul's restaurant was on the corner of Downing and 31st and for the last 11 it has been in the shopping center at 3044 Wolf Road.

"I remember the first day we started with no people coming in so we put a piece of sausage on the grill to make the smell go outside and everybody lined up to come in for sandwiches," Ambrogio said.

Gattuso's girlfriend Andrea Carlino and his daughter Christina contribute Paul's hard work ethic and his treatment of his customers and employees as a testament to his longevity in the business.

“Anybody could boil some pasta. Anybody could steam a hot dog. It’s him. It’s how he treats his people. They know he’ll go leaps and bounds for them,” Carlino said.

Christina, who worked at Paul’s when she was younger, said that Paul always instilled in her to follow her dreams and as long as she works hard, she’ll succeed. Her dreams now are to hopefully start a business of her own or take over her dad’s one day.

For the future of the restaurant, Paul said he would like to open a second location in another area that is more of a sit down restaurant. For now, though he said he loves every minute of it.

“It’s been wonderful. We have a great town, great people in it. We have such wonderful customers; it’s like one big family there,” Gattuso said.