

Alesci's goes high-tech, puts business on Web

By Jeff Piorkowski
Staff Writer

Alesci's Foods, founded in 1943 with Old World values the owners say are adhered to until this day, has entered the 21st century computer age.

And, Frank, Tony and Tony's son, Marc Alesci are thrilled with the results.

The store, celebrating its 50th anniversary at 4333 Mayfield Road in South Euclid, has a full selection of goods it imports from Italy, but it now in the exporting business since WSI Internet Consulting of Beachwood installed a Web site in October. In the past three months, the neighborhood, family-owned business, has gone nationwide.

Orders have come in from the state of Washington, Oregon, Indiana, Louisiana, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Texas, New York, Florida, North and South Carolina and Montana.

"It's hard to believe that someone in Montana needed cheese," Frank Alesci said, "When someone orders cheese, they usually order Alesci's Pasta Sauce, too."

And, for first-time Internet orders, a complimentary container of Frank's creation, the perfect meatball mix, is also mailed out.

The Alesci's estimate that about 30 percent of their on-line customers learn of them on-line as they search for Italian foods. Others know them from having lived in the South Euclid vicinity.

"Oh, yes," said Tony Alesci, 50, who owns the business with Frank Alesci, "they send us notes attached to their orders to tell us about what they remember of our store."

One e-mail customer named Jeanne, said that when her daughter visits the area from Atlanta, Alesci's foods must be served. When she visits her



SUN PHOTO BY JOSEPH DARWAL

Traditional pizza has, for more than 50 years, been a popular seller at Alesci's. The Alesci's kitchen also produces sandwiches and dinner foods.

daughter, according to the e-mail Jeanne sent Alesci's, "I had better have the Pecorino (Romano grating cheese) with me. The joke is, no Pecorino from Alesci's, no ride from the Atlanta airport."

The customer then quoted the business's motto – "Everybody Loves Alesci's."

A customer named Mary wrote, "I remember the smell of your store when I would go with my grandmother and grandfather weekly. Can you bottle it?"

About eight Internet orders come in per week. During the holidays, it was two or three per day.



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Tony, Frank and Marc Alesci, from left, hold some of the imported food products available at the store that carries their family name.

A Louisiana woman recently purchased all six bottles on hand of top-of-the line balsamic vinegar imported from Modena, Italy at a cost of \$150. Other available on-line items include olives, cookies, canned tomatoes and seafood and gift baskets.

It is still too early to tell what percentage increase the Internet has meant to the business, said Frank Alesci, 63, but the first month's results have been impressive.

Founded by Frank and Tony's grandfather, the late Frank Alesci, at East 139th Street and Kinsman, the current building was built in 1957 expressly for the business. It is a move that the Alesci's still appreciate to this day.

"South Euclid is very neighborhood-ish," Frank Alesci said.

"It's very family oriented," Tony adds.

"People ask me if we're ever going to move and I say, 'Why would we? Where are we going to go?'" Frank said. "This is where we should be."

The Alesci's are proud of the business legacy, which includes

being the first area market to have an in-store bakery, and, according to Frank, "We were probably the first in the areas to make traditional Italian sheet pizza, around 1950."

"We're proud of our ancestors and what they left us with," Tony said.

The store also has a full deli and sells prepared foods such as eggplant parmesan, chicken Marsala and cavatelli and meatballs. It also caters, delivering food, but not serving at those locations.

Alesci's employs about 30 people in addition to participation from many family members. Tony's wife, Katherine, and Frank's wife, Kathleen, help out, as do others.

"You don't retire from this business," Frank said, "because it's all family." Frank and Tony's father, Anthony, Sr., who died three years ago, helped out until he was 89.

"You don't retire," Frank said, "all you do is help a little less."

Alesci's is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday. Call (216)382-5100