

HOT POINTS for The Week Of January 15, 2007

BE SMART. BE BRAVE. AND ABOVE ALL, KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.

There's a Dallas-based pizza delivery chain named Pizza Patron.

They've created an uproar.

They're accepting pesos for pizzas.

Whoa. That's one earth-shattering bit of anti-Americanism there. Catering to illegals!

The way they're receiving hate mail and death threats, you'd think they were dragging law abiding Mexicans across the border and forcing them to do the hard, dirty pizza labor we always hear that other Americans won't do.

THERE ARE PESOS IN THEM THAR PIES.

Let's forget for a moment that American businesses all along the Mexican border have been accepting pesos as long as there's been both business and a border.

Who is Pizza Patron?

Founded 20 years ago in Dallas, Pizza Patron is the brainchild of an Italian-Lebanese American named Anthony Swad.

His story is typically American. He works in restaurants for years, learns the business, and finally, he decides to do something unique.

Italian-Lebanese American Anthony Swad opens a chain of pizza delivery stores that cater to America's Hispanic population.

For there is one thing Mr. Swad has likely noticed.

No matter who you are, where you're from, the color of your skin or the sound of your mother tongue...

EVERYBODY LOVES PIZZA.

And somewhere along the line, working closely with Hispanics in Texas, he must've noticed something else...

A lot of Spanish speakers are reluctant to call for pizza delivery because they are (a) embarrassed to speak English badly, and/or (b) are afraid they'd end up with caramelized onion and anchovy instead of chorizo.

Which is why Pizza Patron has bilingual employees.

If you don't speak English well, you'll know that Pizza Patron can speak pizza with you.

That's called serving your market.

And guess what, folks.

Those callers (the majority of whom are here legally—law of averages) have pesos.

So?

My wife is a Jew from Philadelphia. She has pesos, too.

Me, a WASP from Connecticut, I don't.

But I did once step into a phone booth, pull a fistful of change from my pocket, found money from five different countries—and still had nothing to put into that pay phone.

IF ONLY THAT PAYPHONE HAD ACCEPTED PESETAS, FRANCS, LIRE, ECC OR PENCE.

It would've been quite convenient.

Many foreign businesses speak English and take US Dollars. It's a convenience to Americans who would otherwise feel uncomfortable.

Allowing Pizza Patron patrons to proffer pesos makes perfect sense.

And realistically, why would illegals have pesos? They're coming here to work. Presumably, they're working for American dollars.

But...

I wanted to know more.

I wanted to know what Pizza Patron was really like.

So my wife (who was humoring me) joined me for the half hour drive to one of the only two Pizza Patrons in California.

In a scruffy, hard-working little neighborhood in a dinky little strip mall, there was Pizza Patron—a small, bright and cheery place, take-out only, with an insanely simple menu and limited selections.

YOU CAN BUY A LARGE PIZZA, HALF A LARGE PIZZA, OR CHICKEN WINGS.

That's it. Toppings abound. (There is a 50-cent surcharge for anchovies.)

The counter folks were delightful, and couldn't have been happier to serve us. Friendly, cheerful, glad to have us as customers, made sure we understood the special offers available to us on our next visit. (Two-for-one Tuesdays!)

We settled on a large pizza, half pepperoni, half chorizo. (When in Rome...)

A bargain at \$4.99.

The crust was a soft, spongy creation similar to the Greek pizzas of my New England youth. The sauce had a nice, tangy flavor that reminded my wife of the classic New York street pizzas.

She preferred the pepperoni.

I liked the zippy flavor of the chorizo.

All in all, not bad for commercial delivery pizza. (There is a pizza hierarchy. Commercial delivery pies have their own stratum, as do boutique pizzas, street pizzas, classic pizzas and old world pizzas. A Dominos pizza, for instance, is not to be compared with the reigning kings of neo-Neapolitan pizza in New Haven.)

The Pizza Patron product is good and probably consistent. If the local store is any indication, the company culture is very welcoming and customer-service oriented.

And my prediction is the Pesos for Pizzas campaign will work out well for them—as long as they maintain their courage and their will.

EASY FOR ME TO SAY. SO WHAT DO THEY DO ABOUT THE HATE MAIL?

Two words: free pizza.

When somebody gets so worked up they have to fume and spit and call your mother names, what better way to disarm them than to share the love?

“I’m sorry you feel that way. Why don’t you come down, see what we’re all about, and have a pizza on us. I think you’ll change your mind.”

I’m guessing most of the hate mongers would pass on the opportunity.

But they’d be likely to walk away a little bit embarrassed.

There’s nothing quite as effective or satisfying as taking the wind out of somebody’s sails with love.

As always,

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