

Ledo PIZZA.

Written by **Dan Whetzel**
Photo by **Lance C. Bell**

**Now at DEEP CREEK LAKE
in McHENRY**



Owner Charlie Yommer, right, with family members from left to right: son, Adam, wife Debbie and daughter-in-law, Jen.

“LEDO PIZZA has become a celebratory food and tradition. It’s a place for University of Maryland students, players, alumni, and sports fans to gather before and after home games. And Ledo is always a great place to meet friends! Rob Beall’s sentiments have been echoed by thousands of University of Maryland sports fans over the decades, including those from Western Maryland who have made the trek eastward to combine athletic events with the Ledo Pizza experience. Rob Beall is part of a family tradition that stretches back more than five decades.

The Ledo tradition began during the post World War II era. Many GI’s serving in the European Theatre of Operations sampled pizza for the first time during their tour of duty and, upon returning to the states, represented a promising market to the food industry. Pizza shops began opening in major metropolitan centers soon after the war and then expanded into the suburbs during the 1950s. Robert L. Beall, grandfather of Rob Beall and founder of Ledo Pizza, began his business during this time in an unusual way.

Mr. Beall was a traditional Maryland tobacco farmer and later a county liquor inspector. According to Rob Beall, “Grandfather decided it was time to do something else. His job as a liquor inspector brought him into contact with restaurant owners who seemed to be doing much better than tobacco farmers. The restaurants were always full and growing in number.” That observation prompted a decision to open a pizza restaurant in October, 1955, near the University of Maryland in Adelphi. A two-lane road adjacent to the university seemed like a great location to open a business. As events unfolded, however, the road was closed for improvements in the spring of 1956.

“That first year was tough. You couldn’t get into the building. But that experience taught my grandfather a valuable lesson — reach out to the community. He joined the Terrapin Club, Rotary Club, and had fundraisers at schools to bring people into the restaurant. The next year when the road re-opened as a four lane highway things really took off. My grandfather never forgot the importance of being involved with the community.”

Americans were being introduced to pizza during the 1950s, so there were no connoisseurs to critically evaluate if things were being carried out in the proper manner. According to Rob Beall, “There was no pizza culture back then. We just winged it.”

Improvising began after Robert Beall hired employees from a recently closed restaurant to begin making a unique pizza. “That’s how it began but then we started doing things the ‘wrong’ way. We bought sticks of pepperoni that workers had to slice by hand. Because it was faster to slice the pepperoni sticks into thick slices rather than very thin ones, our pizza was served with large portions. We had rectangular pans instead of round ones, so that is what we used to serve square pieces of pizza. And we bought smoked provolone cheese. The word got out and people loved the pizza that way. All of those early recipe changes are now a signature part of Ledo.” Pizza, Ledo style, is also distinguished from other recipes by offering a thin crust, sweeter sauce, and pre-cooked bacon.

Robert Beall’s pizza restaurant business prospered during the early years. The second generation became involved when Robert M. Beall took over the enterprise from his father and reached a decision to open another restaurant not far from the original one in Adelphi. Despite their proximity, both stores realized an increase in sales. During the early 1980s Ledo also began licensing products by selling its recipe to other restaurants. Rob Beall recalled, “The restaurant would have its sign displayed and then a ‘Featuring Ledo Pizza’ sign underneath.”

The third generation of Bealls, Rob and James, have carried the Ledo tradition to the next level. Currently Ledo Pizza has 90 locations in 10 states.

One of the most recent additions to the Ledo success story occurred July 7, 2008, when Charlie and Debbie Yommer opened their restaurant in McHenry, Maryland. Mr. Yommer credits Hugh Umbel, owner of McHenry Plaza, with establishing the Ledo name at Deep Creek Lake. "Hugh is the one who turned us on to Ledo; he thought it would be a good fit for the area. Many of our customers come from the Washington D.C. - Baltimore metropolitan area and they readily identify with the Ledo brand. We often have vacationers driving by the shopping center who see the Ledo Pizza sign — they make a point to stop in. The name recognition has really helped us."

Charlie Yommer's experience with Ledo Pizza has been outstanding from the start. "Before we got into the business, we visited a Ledo restaurant to check out the food. After tasting the pizza, I said to Debbie — this is it. This pizza is great!" The Yommer's previous experience in the pizza business enabled them to immediately recognize the Ledo difference. "We make our dough every two hours. The fresh dough combined with a special sweet sauce and smoked provolone cheese makes Ledo Pizza special." And while pizza is the featured menu item, additional selections include stromboli, calzone, wings, and baked cheese fries.

The Ledo sports tradition is also upheld at McHenry Plaza where patrons may view athletic events on a wide screen television, while enjoying the benefits of a full service bar. The combination of celebratory food and tradition that has made Ledo Pizza a sentimental favorite of University of Maryland fans has been extended to Garrett County. And as always, Ledo Pizza remains a great place to meet old friends and make new ones.

For more information contact Ledo Pizza, Deep Creek Lake at **301-387-6300**.



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