
The Post-Standard

The meatball mix definitely is the best-seller, Frances says. During my stopover, one regular, Joe Anderson, of Jamesville, left with \$69 worth of mix, headed for Binghamton, where he planned to drop off portions for the personal lunches of hospital workers on his regular route. "They fell in love with the product," he says.

Another customer I had to swear not to name picked up her regular mix order, saying, "My husband thinks I make the meatballs myself." Like other clients, she rolls the mix into balls and freezes it for future use.

"Here comes another meatballer," Joe Cavallo says as Nancy Zanoni enters the store for a mix order, which Joe scoops out of the brimming tray provided by Marc Ascioti. Nancy says she's been a customer "more than 20 years."

Marc shows me the business card of Robert VanHorne, another regular who walked out with 40 pounds of mix, packed in dry ice and headed for Thailand.

Peter Vilasi, Marc's uncle, managed the store most of his life. He showed Marc how to mix the meatball recipe. Marissa, Marc's daughter, sometimes helps out at the store, also.

Judith LaManna, a Solvay native, mentioned Ascioti's in her book, "Solvay Stories II," in a story about Pete (Vilasi) the Butcher:

"He used to cheerfully sing out to me, 'What can I get for you today, Dolly?' I thought it was a special name for me but learned he used the same line with other girls. For adults asking for meat, he had a different line; he would look up, wipe his thick hands on his blood-stained apron and reply, 'I'll get that for you, my friend.' "

Frances Quattrone says she enjoys checking out orders and keeping the books at Ascioti's, "because I love being with people."

No, she says, the store's just the right size: "I don't think we need to expand," she explains. "I think we'll stop selling cigarettes when the stock we have is gone, but things are fine the way they are."

The store buys most of its meat from Oneonta Beef in East Syracuse, a longtime arrangement, according to manager Joe Cavallo, who says he moved to the store after Pete Vilasi promised "I have a nice job for you."

He's an old-school meat cutter. "Most of the meat comes into stores these days all boxed up," he says. "Today, the handlers don't know how to break down a side of beef the way we used to."

That said, Joe dived into cutting 100 pounds of stew meat for Coleman's Authentic Irish Pub.

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