

# Manggia, Manggia!

## Walkerville Welcomes Big Tony's

Story and photos Chris Edwards

So many fine buildings in Olde Walkerville have stood the test of time. While much of Windsor's heritage architecture has been torn down, the model town that Hiram Walker built remains a shining example of historic preservation.

One site that has seen many incarnations over the last 150 years is the southwest corner of Niagara Street and Walker Road. Originally the Farmer's Roost (or Rest), the building's heyday was from the 1940s to the late seventies when it was known as the Metropole Supper Club and featured primarily Big Band sounds. As musical tastes changed, the Metropole eventually gave way to California's, a rowdy rock and top 40s bar, and most recently, a blues club that struggled briefly and then closed.

For a time, the legendary venue remained empty and seemed destined to share the fate of many other Windsor buildings, lost forever to the wrecking ball. But lately, the parking lot out back is jammed and the joint is jumping with happy customers

devouring rib-sticking, homemade Italian food, rendered even more enjoyable by tasty live jazz on the weekends.

Big Tony's Original Wood Fired Pizza Company is the brainchild of Tony Gallippi (hence the name Big Tony's). Tony helped launch the Walkerville Pizza Company on Wyandotte between Windermere and Chilver, a highly popular business that struggled with ownership issues. He'd moved on long before that enterprise imploded and launched Big Tony's this past March.

Busy since his doors opened, Tony's cozy yet spacious room is licensed for 153, but currently seats a comfortable 90. Guests can sit on bar stools at the prep counter and watch Tony flip pizzas and then pull them out of the wood-fired pizza oven, piping hot. Ordered from Sicily this huge oven was assembled by five craftsmen and dominates the open-air kitchen. Tony laid the tiles on the oven's exterior, then carried the tile theme through to the pillars in the restaurant. Plans for an oyster bar are in the works and should open by December.

Big Tony's cooking philosophy follows a simple, back to basics formula: big portions and good value — like mama used to make (assuming you either had an Italian mama or knew one!). Mains include wood fired penne, lasagna, and eggplant parmigiana (the number one selling dish). In that great Italian tradition of "manggia, manggia," portions are huge; it is highly recommended you bring a big appetite.

Pannini (Italian sandwiches) are perfect for lunch and pay tribute to Tony's favourite ratpackers Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Frank Sinatra — the Chairman of the Board, and sultry Eva Gardner. Big Tony's also



features an array of hot and cold appetizers (the steamed mussels are superb, while the antipasto platter goes down so well paired with a glass of house red).

And then there's the pizza — classic thin-crust baked in that huge wood fired oven. Big Tony offers eight standard varieties, from the classic "Margarita," a simple pie of tangy tomato sauce, lots of fromaggio and fresh basil (grown right in the restaurant), to the more exotic "West Side," smoked salmon, capers, red onions, with a butter base. His twelve-inch crusts come in regular or whole wheat. The finished pie easily feeds two people with average appetites.

You can also "build your own." With over 40 toppings, the possibilities are endless. Toppings run the gamut from sausage, mushroom, peppers, to more exotic fare such as coconut or raisins.

There is a good selection of wines and beers (including Big Tony's beer), and a full bar for those favouring cocktails. Friday and Saturday nights, the pizzeria morphs into a jazz club. Big Tony felt there was a demand for a jazz venue in the city, featuring acts from Windsor and Detroit. Teaming up his food with live jazz to become an "Italian Resto-Jazz Club" has

proven to be a brilliant move. The house is usually packed both nights with many patrons tripping the light fantastic on the dance floor.

Big Tony's is also open for lunch and in the summer, the huge patio caters to those who wish to dine al fresco.

Catering for weddings and special events is also available. There are still some dates available for Christmas parties this year.

You won't find any "fusion cuisine" here, which seems to be the trend in many upscale Italian eateries. Big Tony's unpretentious comfort food, served by an attentive staff, will keep you coming back for more. With live jazz as a digestif what's not to like?

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*Bottom Line:* Appetizers and pizza for two, glass of wine each & tip — \$50

Mon-Thurs: 11:30 am — 10 pm

Fri-Sat: 11:30 am — 2 pm

Closed Sunday

**Big Tony's Original  
Wood Fired Pizza Co.**  
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