

ELEVATING THE BUSINESS OF PIZZA

PMQ Pizza

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THE DOUGH NERDS

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The founders of Flour + Water Pizzeria solved the sog factor in their delivery pizza. Now they're planning for fast growth.

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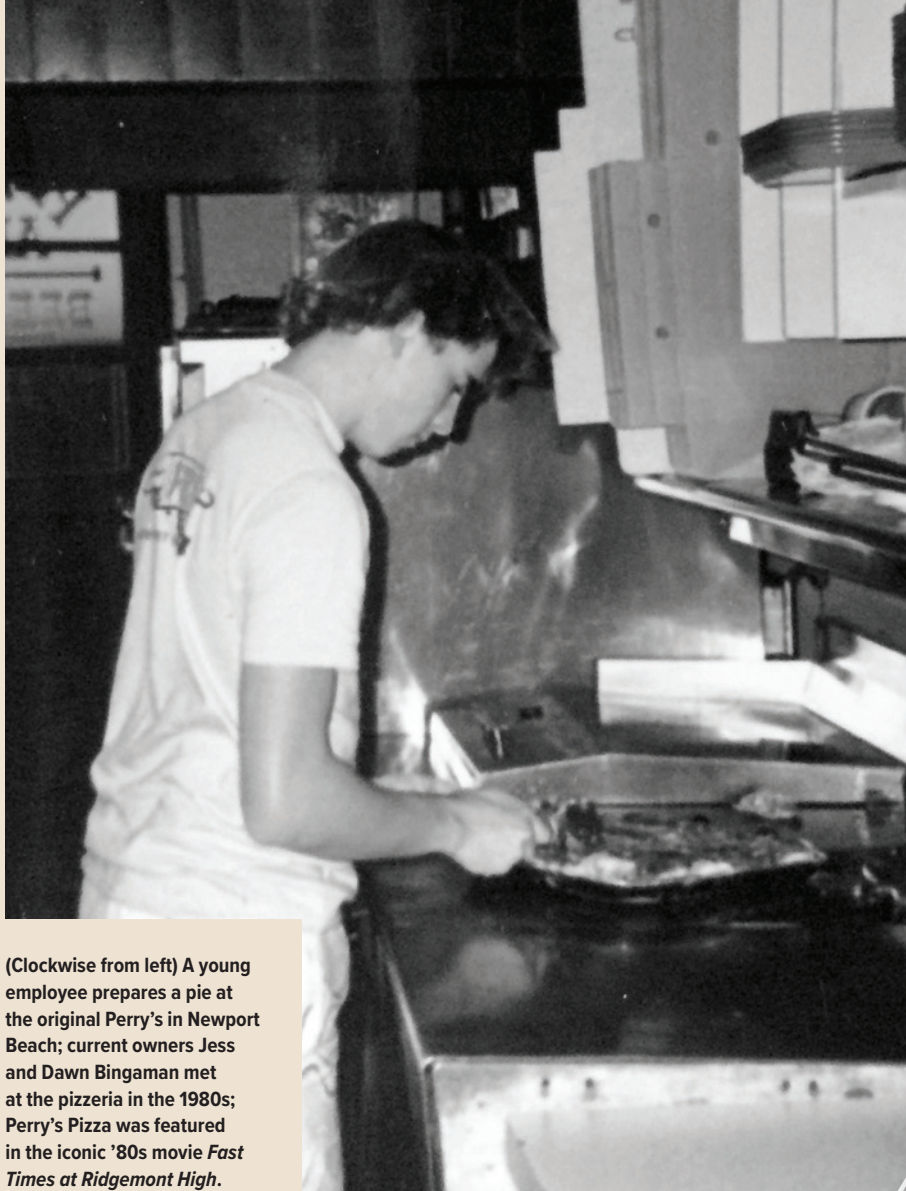
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PIZZA

★ HALL OF FAME ★

BY TRACY MORIN



(Clockwise from left) A young employee prepares a pie at the original Perry's in Newport Beach; current owners Jess and Dawn Bingaman met at the pizzeria in the 1980s; Perry's Pizza was featured in the iconic '80s movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.

Perry's Pizza

When Rick Montano was ready to retire from Perry's Pizza, the business he started in 1973 in Newport Beach, California, he proposed an attractive deal to manager Jess Bingaman, who grabbed the chance at business ownership. The beloved beachside pizzeria was famous locally—and even beyond, as a backdrop in the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*—and it had already changed Jess' life once before. It was there that he met his wife, Dawn, a frequent customer at the pizzeria.

"We met in 1985, got married in 1995, then bought the restaurant in '96," Dawn recalls. "It was kind of surreal, meeting him there and then suddenly working behind the counter!" Luckily, it turned out to be a perfect pairing, in both life and business, since they wield complementary skill sets. Jess masterminds the menu, while Dawn oversees customers and employees, and her sister, Lynette Swanson, handles social media and marketing.

Another shakeup-turned-blessing occurred in 2014, when new owners bought the building where Perry's had served slices to SoCal beachgoers for 40-plus years. When their lease wasn't renewed, the duo nabbed another spot: a former laundromat in a nearby Huntington Beach

shopping center. After a lengthy build-out, Perry's opened to its loyal following and has since expanded into the storefront next door, doubling in size (to almost 4,000 square feet) with an enclosed patio, additional indoor seating, and a 10-seat bar. "The move was a blessing in disguise, because the old location was great, but very seasonal," Dawn says.

"Where we are now is not such a destination, so people come year-round."

"What we've done is turn this location into a destination," Jess adds. "On Friday, Saturday, Sunday nights, the whole neighborhood comes in."

The menu has also grown, with sandwiches, pastas, soups and weekday specials like prime rib Wednesdays, plus staff-designed pizzas that earn a placement if they pass the "Jess taste test." "We still have the same pizza recipe and mixer from the 1970s," Jess says. "We upgraded from a convection to a brick oven, to improve the crust. I learned a lot from Rick, and I'm lucky he chose me. But we've developed a lot more unique stuff and raised the bar. We're not just beach pizza anymore." 🍕

Tracy Morin is PMQ's copy editor.