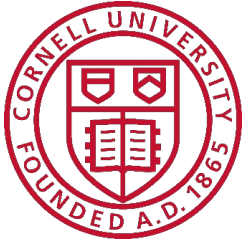


# Cornell Cooperative Extension | Erie County

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*This article is the twelfth in a series focusing on vendors who are selling their wares at the Western New York Welcome Center's **Taste NY Market**. Thank you to Salvatore (Sal) and Cheryl Butera of Salvatore's Specialty Foods for meeting with me to share Salvatore's Specialty Foods' story and some mouth-watering samples along with some marketing tips and strategies.*

## Spotlight on Salvatore's Specialty Foods

Most of us don't remember a time when pizza was *not* the popular meal and snack food that it has become in recent decades. The Butera family, operating under the name Salvatore's was among the early pizza visionaries and pizza and Italian food promoters. Salvatore's Specialty Foods doesn't have a traditional bricks and mortar facility for product preparation and packaging so we met in the kitchen and retail area of the Western New York Welcome Center's Taste NY Market in late January of 2021 and, following COVID-19 protocols, visited about Salvatore's, recorded a series of product preparation demonstrations, and staff sampled some of Salvatore's Specialty Foods many products.

*"Hi everybody. My name is Salvatore Butera, call me Sal. And this is my beautiful wife, Cheryl ("Hi!"). She's "Momma Pizza." The two of us are working very hard together to bring to you our family recipes and traditions and maybe some meal solutions along the way. We hope you enjoy."*

The history of Salvatore's and Salvatore's Specialty Foods is described on their web page: [www.salvatoresspecialtyfoods.com](http://www.salvatoresspecialtyfoods.com). Let's listen to Sal telling the family and company story in his own words.

*"Hi. So let me give you a little bit of the history behind Salvatore's Specialty Foods. In 1955, my parents opened up an Italian restaurant in Blasdell, New York - Salvator's Pizzeria. They had everything from pizza, to pasta, to fried fish back then. They had a full menu. The recipes they brought with them from Italy. So, they are all that authentic, original recipes. The sauce is made on-site; you know, the original sauce recipes that we use today in our products - that's where we*

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*got them. Part of our history also is this is a true family history, true family business. The sauce for the pizza is actually derived between my brother, my father, and my mom, where the three of them put their heads together (& their tastebuds) and came up with the perfect pizza sauce. So, they just used a combination of old world recipes and new world taste. This was back in the fifty's when pizza wasn't exactly the most popular deal that it is today - popular food that it is today. Same thing with the pasta sauce. They used old world recipes and they did it from scratch.*

*That's some of the things that made our restaurant so unique back then was the ... authenticity ... of the food people were coming in to enjoy. You could not deny it. The other is that there is that people were coming to enjoy; you could deny it. So it's the aromas that came out of the kitchen I remember to this day, I was just a young child back then, but it's that, that aroma, that, you know, I remember and I hope to give back, and that warm, friendly greeting when you came into the restaurant. That's what made our family restaurant what it was, and was the basis of where we are today."*

Most Erie County Fair goers will recognize Salvatore's Specialty Foods from their "Salvatore's Pizza Trailer" pizza stand at the top of the Fair's "Avenue of Flags."

*"As my parents opened up in this new business back in 1955, they had an opportunity to bring the pizza to the Erie County Fair. Pizza was kind of a new item in the 50s, if you will, and it was a little unique, so, uhh, my mom and dad decided to go for the opportunity. And we're still there at the top of the 'Avenue of Flags.' And this will be, possibly, depending with COVID, our 65 yr. at the Erie Co. Fair. So, I know a lot of customers up and enjoy the product and they see our menu. This is an opportunity for us to offer them some of that tastiness throughout the year they can make at their own home. My dad used to say 'Fresh hot pizza right out of the oven.' Well, let's change that to 'Fresh hot pizza right out of YOUR oven.'"*

Salvatore's Pizzeria closed in the mid-1960s as the Butera family focused its business on fair and festival events. Most recently, the business has expanded into production and marketing of a year-round line of sauces, pizza dough and fresh frozen pastas. Sal and Cheryl's children Thomas, Jennifer, and Samantha, Thomas' wife Liz, Jennifer's husband Aaron, and the youngest "pizza chef," Zachary all have roles in the business. Sal said there's also another "pizza person on the way." He added, "the business and the family are both growing."

Salvatore's Specialty Foods LLC has been in business in the current form for "six or seven years." Sal described the venture as a strategy to expand the festival season business to a year-round enterprise. He said as the pizza stand menu expanded to include pasta, Stromboli, meatballs, stuffed hot peppers, flatbread, and other products, so did the customer base. Year after year, patrons would return to the stand, eventually with children or grandchildren in tow. "We're so honored that our customers are so loyal. And if it wasn't for the customers saying where are we going to get our pizza when the fair and the festival season is done, I probably wouldn't have come up with this idea," said Sal. That was the inspiration and motivation for Salvatore's Specialty Foods.

Sal and Cheryl took over the fair and event pizza stand business from Sal's father in the late 1970s. As they looked at business development opportunities, especially to make room for younger family members, rather than jumping back into the saturated pizza restaurant business, Sal and Cheryl decided to focus their efforts on products that loyal customers could buy in retail outlets for home use. Thinking back to the stools that young Sal and then his children occupied in the pizza stand when they were young, he wanted to provide families with the experience of using Salvatore's Specialty Foods products ingredients in their own homes.

Salvatore's Specialty Foods' web page lists the retail locations and specialty stores where its products can be purchased, in addition to the Taste NY Market at the Western New York Welcome Center. "We have a couple of distributors that help us get the products to market," Sal said. Presently that includes John Mills Distributing Company and Finger Lakes Artisan Foods.

All of Salvatore's Specialty Foods are made in Western New York. All the packaging including labels, jars and caps are made in the United States. Sal said it was a bit of a challenge to find material that didn't come from overseas and Pacific Rim sources. During this COVID-19 pandemic, one of the logistics challenges has been getting timely shipments of packaging in the right sizes and quantities for Salvatore's Specialty Foods' scale of production and marketing needs. Providing and maintaining certificates of origin to meet labeling standards and market requirements like those of the "Made in America" store takes a little time but it's part of Sal's commitment to New York State and American-made inputs in all Salvatore's Specialty Foods products.

COVID-19 pandemic impacts on the business have been huge, including the closure of the Erie County Fair in 2020 along with all other festivals and special events. "Jars are an issue," Sal said. This has resulted in a few periods of having to shut down production lines until jars and lids became available. The Buteras feel fortunate to have the food products line which continues to keep them very busy, especially as they look at opportunities to move their small batch, artisanal products to a larger scale for marketing in regional grocery store chains and other geographic areas. Packaging, price, and consistency are critical, particularly as specialty food products gain steadily in market share across the country.

As we continued our discussion about Salvatore's Specialty Foods products, Sal and Cheryl began a series of food preparation demonstrations and tastings starting with "Buffalo-style" pizza.

*"So, today I think what we're going to do is we're going to make some goodies with our SSF pizza dough mix and pizza sauce. So, there's a huge idea that NY pizza is the best pizza. Well, NY is a great big state with a bunch of great big items throughout NYS. New York-style pizza is the large, thin, folded up pizza that you eat. Buffalo-style pizza has its own special uniqueness. Salvatore's Specialty Foods, our pizza comes from Buffalo, NY. Part of the process is our pizza*

*sauce. It's delicious. It's sweet. It's bold. But the sweetness doesn't come from sugar, at least not in the original that we have. The sweetness comes from the tomatoes that we put in. Our pizza dough mix is made specifically for the half sheet pan of pizza. When you cook it that way you find that you're going to get that nice, little thickness in your crust. Not a deep dish like a Chicago-style. And again, we're Sicilian-style pizza; but it's Buffalo-style(!). It's a medium base. Light, fluffy crust and crispy on the bottom. What's nice about our product is you can do so many different things with it.*

*For example, if you don't want large pizza, you can make too smaller pies. This, I took the dough ball that you're going to get when you put this in your mixer. Make the pizza dough. Let it raise and you take it out. You can divide it in half. And you can make two 12" pies. One 12" pie. Two 8 or 10" pies. Or what we're going to do today is we're gonna do a little treat for us. We're gonna make pizza fritte. You might know it as fried dough when you go to the fairs and festivals.*

*So, I saved a little bit of this. It's about 8 or 10 oz. of dough here. And I'm gonna show you when we're all done here how we can actually make....pizza fritte.*

*So...here's our 12 inch pie. I took the dough, cut it in half. I topped it with our sauce, cheese, and, of course, Buffalo-style pepperoni is the 'cup and char' pepperoni. Very few areas of the country use this style pepperoni. WNY is one of them. And it's growing throughout the nation. People originally looked at it and said, 'man, that's pepperoni's looks burnt.' Well, it isn't. It's actually the casing that helps it crisp up on the edge and cup up and char. So, let's look at bacon for example. Some people like soft, easy bacon, Some people like crispy bacon. There's flavor there & you can't beat the flavor in our pepperoni."*

After mentioning the "cup and char" pepperoni that is characteristic of "Buffalo-style" pizza, Sal popped his pizzas into the Taste NY Market ovens and then brought them out for slicing and tasting. He went on to talk about "pizza fritte," another use of his pizza dough mix and fried dough product.

*"And all you use is regular vegetable oil. I would set your temperature at about 350°. And that should do it fine for you. As you see, it does not take long to cook up in the deep fryer."*

Sal promises that "pizza fritte" will be one of the treats that children will remember, especially when they experience helping with preparations and toppings of their own choosing.

It's something that you can do quickly and easily in your own home. You don't have to wait for fair and festival season. It's things they'll remember!

*"Look at that. You've got fried dough, right out of your kitchen."*

Moving on from the pizza and pizza fritte demonstrations, Sal and Cheryl showed us one of the recipes available on their web page: "Cowboy Nachos."

*“Okay, so I told everyone about our delicious, nutritious, sweet, spicy salsa. This stuff is amazing. It will give your chips to taste it's never had. But I'll tell you what else you do with our salsa. You could make "Cowboy Nachos." Now, you know the Welcome Centers here do have our recipe for the Cowboy Nachos posted. And we do have it on line. Or if you need it, just e-mail me. I'll send it to you. So what we want to do is.... I use a black, cast iron ... put a little bit of olive oil in ... take some nice steak seasoning. Put that on. And I'll take red and orange peppers and I'll cook them almost to caramelized. And then as that's done, I have a steak cooking low and slow in the oven or on your smoker, whatever you prefer, and you take that steak, again, with that seasoning on there, and right as it's (you heat it to about 130 internal degree temperature), you take it out these guys will be just about finished. You take that steak and you set it on on that black cast iron. And you sear it for about min. on each side. And it'll be cooked perfectly for you.*

*You take the steak (I like to use a ribeye). To me it's the most flavorful, juicy steak that's out there. You're gonna take this. You're gonna cut this up in small pieces.”*

He continued...

*“As I said you wanna do this to an internal temp. of 130. What that'll do is it'll give you a nice medium rare to rare finish on the steak. You want that 'cause if you remember I said, you're gonna braise this or sear this in that black cast iron pan for about a minute on each side. And that'll give it enough of a cook to finish it off. And it'll also keep all the juices for ya.”*

And then began assembling the cowboy nachos plate before sliding it in the oven to heat the chips and melt the cheese ...

We now top our chips, and our peppers, and steak.

*“Now .... we take our salsa, and we take a nice blended cheese. Don't be afraid to add the cheese. We want to keep those NYS dairy farms happy. Now what we're gonna do is we're gonna take this and put it in the oven. We're gonna want to melt that cheese. In a few minutes, when that comes out, we're gonna top it with our salsa, sour cream, and chives. And I think there's a few people in the audience who are gonna really enjoy what they gonna be getting.”*

After a final topping of salsa, sour cream, and chives, the Taste NY Market staff and I had a chance to sample the Salvatore's Specialty Foods salsa Cowboy Nachos.

*“Now, you're at the campground, at home. You just took this out of your oven, You just took it off of your grill. What you do is add some of our delicious salsa right on top of that. Don't be bashful. Don't be shy. Now take some sour cream. Chives. Bam! You're all set. You have a delicious, appetizer, meal, you name it. Whatever you want to call it; that you will not believe the*

*flavor that comes out of this. It's enjoyable. It's easy to do. You'll love it. And, you know what, you'll have a bunch of fans out there. Even if you do this at a tailgate, you'll have a lot of people eating delicious."*

Sal and Cheryl weren't done though. After the pizza, pizza fritte, and Cowboy Nachos, they introduced us to a new product in the Salvatore's Specialty Foods line: their premium fresh frozen pasta. Sal chose to demonstrate their fresh frozen bucatini. While bucatini is just one of Salvatore's Specialty Foods pastas, I thought I'd mention a link to a New York Magazine "Grub Street" article by Rachel Handler titled, "What the Hole is Going On? The very real, totally bizarre bucatini shortage of 2020" ([www.grubstreet.com/2020/12/2020-bucatini-shortage-investigation.html](http://www.grubstreet.com/2020/12/2020-bucatini-shortage-investigation.html)). If you don't live near a retail outlet, Salvatore's Specialty Foods ships this frozen item Monday through Wednesday by FedEx 2-day shipping. See the web page for more information.

*"So, today I'd like to introduce you all to our Salvatore's Specialty Foods premium fresh frozen pasta. This pasta is made with Durum Semolina wheat. There's 18 grams of protein per serving. You get 1 lb. of pasta in a package. And, I'll tell ya, it's probably one of the best pastas. If you ever had homemade pasta, you know that there's nothing like it. Another nice benefit of this is it's ready in 4 min. So it doesn't take long to cook. Also, our Salvatore's Italian-style pastas (sauces) - this is a true, rustic Italian-style. This, again, was a family recipe we're again are a small batch company. We do things in that intimate, artisanal way. So, yes, we can produce 1000s & 1000s of jars. But, we only produce them in small batches. So we could maintain the quality, the aroma, the flavor, the standard that my mom would have on her sauce. What I have here, again, the bucatini, and what we've done is we've... boiled this up for 4 minutes. It's all ready to go. And let me heat this up."*

After the pasta was heated and drained, Sal continued.

*"So, we've got our bucatini. We just took it out ... of the hot water. We put it in a colander. We let it drain the best we can. What you might want to do at home. I always do this, especially with the bucatini. "Bucatini macaroni Siciliana," what it is, look, it's hollow. Don't know if you can see that or not. But, it's delicious. It'll help absorb more of the sauce flavor inside the pasta itself. So we take our bucatini. Mix it with our sauce (plate). Again, you can serve this with meatballs, braciole, whatever you want to have in there to finish it up. Of course, you can toss it with your favorite grated cheese. Where would we be without basil? There. Now, you've got a delicious meal solution for the whole family to enjoy & come back to time and time again. Quick, easy, wholesome. Good for you. And good! Tasty for the tummy. (chuckle)"*

While Taste NY Market staff, Alexandria Thibeault and Dean Cataffo sampled the Salvatore's Specialty Foods' bucatini and pasta sauce, Sal explained their pasta production and marketing process.

Sal said, “You give us the order for what you want. We manufacture it. It's frozen and then delivered to you. It's not stored in a freezer someplace for months. You get it made fresh just about that day.”

As Sal and Cheryl Butera continued to describe plans for Salvatore’s Specialty Foods, Sal spoke about his experience away from the family business as a sales representative for a Fortune 500 company. Those business skills and experiences helped Sal’s dream of a family business based on traditional Italian recipes become a reality.

*“So, if you're like me and you're going into business. And you have a passion for something that you did or hobby that you want to turn into a profession, and it doesn't matter if it's food or anything, everyone probably goes through some of these same issues and growing pains. And growing pains are a good thing. The most difficult part of the business, for me, is that, you know, you need to wear different hats different times. Sometimes you're manufacturing. Sometimes you're selling. Sometimes you're delivering. Sometimes you're doing banking. And it gets overwhelming. There's no doubt about it. Our plan, and our hope is to find a good strong distribution partner that, you know, we can rely on to not only bring our products to market, but, bring our products and be able to let people know that they have this. You know, I'm not necessarily looking for an order taker. I'm looking for someone that can suggest something that's gonna help the business grow.*

*In my past life, I was a retail sales representative for a Fortune 500 company. And I always prided myself on the fact that, you know, you need to be that point person. You need to look as someone's business and say you have a void here, or something is low here. How can we fix this? How can we fill that? And that's what I'm saying to a distributor... There are plenty of great distributors out there. And so many of them are missing the boat. They just take an order and leave.*

*There's so much that every retailer... if you're a retailer, you're a mom and pop, you're going through the same issues that I'm going through as a manufacturer. Everyone's got bills to pay. There's issues with employees, and this and that. It becomes wonderful to have that rep., that person you can count on, that you can call up and say, ‘Hey, I need know about this or that? Can you help me? Can you direct me?’*

*And that's part of our plan. Our marketing plan is not just to go into a store and say, ‘Hey, take our product 'cause it tastes the best.’ Our marketing plan is to go into a store and say ‘This is where the best placement for our product is gonna be. This is how I wanna promote it. This is what I'm willing to do.’ And, you know, I just hope that distributors take a look at this as well as retailers and say okay, fine. When I now have a distributor fill my shoes for me they will be able to continue the idea of being value added and helping that retailer's sales grow.”*

You’ll notice Sal’s reference to a marketing plan. Having a well-developed, flexible and regularly updated marketing plan was one of Sal’s take-home messages. In addition to its web page and

free newsletter subscription option, you can follow Salvatore's Specialty Foods and Salvatore's Pizza Trailer on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. As pandemic conditions permit, Salvatore's is also booking events, large and small,

for later in the season. As the Salvatore's Specialty Foods web page says, "We would love to become part of your tradition!"

Thank you to Sal and Cheryl Butera for taking the time to prepare and demonstrate some of the many products in their line of small batch, artisanal and traditional Italian-style pizza and pasta products including their "Buffalo-style" pizza sauce and dough mix. As they say on their web page, "Salvatore's has been serving fresh hot pizza right out of the oven since 1956!" They look forward to continuing the tradition for family and friends as conditions permit. Meanwhile, freshly prepared pizza and pasta can be part of your own family tradition when you pick up Salvatore's Specialty Food products at the Taste NY Market at the Western New York Welcome Center or at one of the many area markets, delis, grocery stores and shops that carry Salvatore's Specialty Foods products.

Salvatore's Specialty Foods is another example of how family run small businesses in Western New York and throughout the State are continually adjusting to changes in the economy and markets and is one of the many businesses working to make fresh, tasty and nutritious, locally grown or processed and packaged foods, beverages, specialty goods, and services available to consumers in the region.



Taste NY at the Western New York  
Welcome Center is operated by:

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