

PNMQ

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La Nova Does It Again!

The Successful Cloning Of America's Busiest Pizzeria

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La Nova Does It Again!

The Successful Cloning Of America's Busiest Pizzeria.

By Steve Green

It's a mess! Traffic is backed up on Main Street. Police officers are busily working to keep traffic moving. Neighboring businesses are complaining that their parking lots are filled; yet their stores have no customers. The commotion at 5151 Main Street is no accident, it's the long awaited opening of La Nova's second store and Buffalo, New York, is celebrating. Sales for the first few weeks of May 2001 were incredible, even by La Nova standards, PMQ had to come back and revisit the Todaro family to follow up on the original story we did three years earlier. When America's busiest pizzeria opens a store as popular as the original you have to ask, "How did they do it?"

After spending another memorable four days in Buffalo doing this second La Nova story, I can tell you that there have been quite a few changes. The interior of the old store got a facelift. The wing side of the business has doubled and Carla Todaro became Mrs. Sam Pantano. Much has changed in the way things are, but nothing has changed in the way the Todaros manage their business. The success formula is still the same: product first, operations second and then when you have something worth telling people about, market like mad. And they have their special definition of marketing given their unique history and status in the Buffalo pizza market.

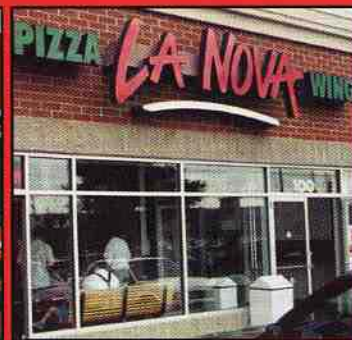
In the fall of 1998, we did our original story about La Nova. If you'd like to reread the story for background information, you'll find it online by going to www.pmq.com and clicking the "Previous Issues" picture and clicking the fall 1998 cover or go straight there at www.pmq.com/lanova_pizza_before.shtml.



Left to right: Joey, Cookie, and Joe Todaro. Behind Joe is Carla Todaro's new husband and expectant father Sam Pantano. This picture was taken just after a very strong Friday night rush and no one looks tired.



Ferry Street

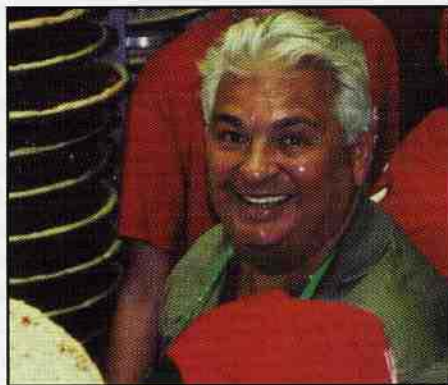


Main Street

THE PMQ JOE TRACKER



Papa Joe Todaro, the Founder



Big Joe Todaro, the Motivator



Joey Todaro, the President

Now that there are two locations with monster sales, it takes more than managers Jimmy "D" at the new location on Main Street (Amherst) and Vinny D'Amico at their original store on West Ferry Street. It takes more than Kuzara Brothers, Mike, T and Joe; they've been helping out for more than 20 years. There's their floating manager, Santo Falzone. Working everyday are the five members of the Todaro family: Cookie, Carla and the Joes. Yes, there are actually three Joe Todaro's. Papa Joe is 78 and is the one most in charge of the product and recipes. Big Joe, 56 years old, is most responsible for a quality product out the door as he cheerleads and continuously trains the crew. Joey, 33 is most in charge of marketing and of course the wing side of the business. To ensure the family business continues in perpetuity, meet Joey's first son who just turned 7. His name? You guessed it. No doubt, you'll be reading about him in the future. More fourth generation superstars are on the way.

All the Todaro's get involved in all activities on any given day, but the focus is always on the pizza. "Watch the pie," says Joe, "and the rest will take care of itself." Well, that's almost true. But it's really what he does while he has that thought planted in his brain that makes the difference.

The Power of Caring

It's not just a philosophy poster. Their business and their personal reputations are on the line everyday. They really care that every pizza is perfect, they really care that every customer is happy. They care so much they will do whatever it takes to do a quality job. Joe Todaro is probably the most visible example of the missionary zeal that is a Todaro management trademark. Watch how in the following illustration of his management style how his caring for quality is taught to his crew as he constantly recruits converts to the La Nova val-

ues of quality and perfection.

Joe's management skills are as strong as any manager I've ever seen in action. He is a natural. He can be as serious and as stern as the teacher who never let you get away with anything when he needs to be. At other times he will tease like an older brother, laugh with you like a dear friend, unconsciously dispense hugs, winks and smiles like your own dear old dad. The results are spectacular.

A hard working focused crew that knows what they are doing.

As he walks through the crowd of employees, he touches or slaps the backs of nearly everyone in his way. He fires a comment acknowledging them and making each one smile. He electrifies the crew charging them up for the eminent dinner rush. He yells a "welcome back" to an employee on the other side of the store forcing the attention of the everyone on the singled out and slightly embarrassed driver. The employee lights up while others work even more intently not wanting to be the next to draw his attention.

Joe makes his way through the crowd like a respected politician slowly making it to the ovens where he kids with the employees, and then he uses the attention he's gathered to make a point. He shifts a pizza reminding the group about oven tending basics. He pokes down a bubble, "What's a matter with you?" he shouts to the oven tender. "Why did you let this bubble get on the pizza, here let's fix it." He pokes down the bubble and asks for three pepperonis to fix the hole. "There, don't let that happen again." He smiles at the tender, laughs, gives him a poke and moves on to an employee named Salvatore. "Hey, it's so great you came in today. We love you." Out of the corner of his eye, he spots a problem across the room. An employee forgets to sprinkle Parmesan cheese on the sauced



Father & son conference with manager Jimmy D, before rush. Counter displays pizzas for sale by the slice.



Believe me! It tastes just as good as it looks.

pizza. He appears very upset at what he views as an insult to a customer. He yells out to the employee and store manager the problem that he spotted. He turns to the employee and says, "Do that again and you're fired." Before the employee has a chance to fully register the comment, he produces a hearty and contagious laugh and hugs the employee. The point is well taken; I really care about this pizza and so should you!

Joe is able to create excitement and urgency in his crew and keep them trained with his nudges and comments, yet he leaves them with a level of acknowledgement and attention that makes them feel like part of a real family. At LaNova that is not an empty slogan, people really do feel that way.

"That's what we are here," says Joe. "This is our family. These are good kids we have here and we appreciate each one of them. Without them, where would we be? We don't ever use coupons. When our customer pays top dollar for a pie, we have to give them what they paid for—a quality pie. And if we want to

keep and attract employees that can give us the level of service we need to produce that quality, we have to make La Novas a fun place to work. A place where people can come and feel comfortable and be part of something they can be proud of." La Nova was started by Papa Joe back in 1957 and for the most part ran only one store until 2001 when the Todaros opened the second location. So, with all of the success of the first store and the second location looking to perform equally as well, why has La Nova not expanded to more locations or franchised the concept? "That's a question we hear a lot", says Joey. "Buffalo is home and our focus right now is to satisfy our existing pizza customers who have been very good to us for many years. Instead of opening more pizza stores, we've really ended up using our knowledge of

pizza and wings to make our La Nova Wings business better. Owning and operating the pizza stores has been invaluable to us in competing in the wing business. Having these two stores in the birthplace of the chicken wing, gives us the most knowledgeable group of wing taste testers in the world. And that's allowed us to test new ideas and products and share them with our La Nova Wing customers."

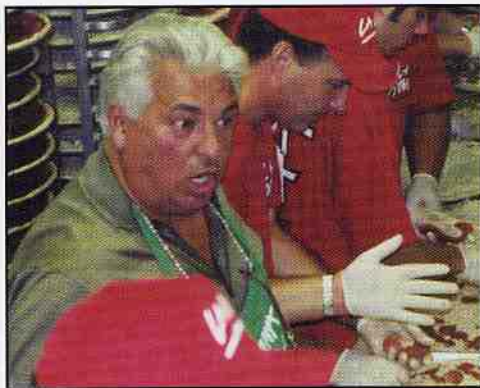
While Joey doesn't like to talk about what all they do to serve the community, he does say that they contribute to several local charities and work with many local youth groups like little league teams. So how do you operate the busiest pizzeria in America? It's

no easy task.

It takes over 100 employees at the original location and the newest store employs over 60. That doesn't mean the Todaros have time to sit around and let the shops run themselves.

"Every member of the family is in here seven days a week," Joey says. They work side by side with the employees and take the time to meet and greet as many customers as possible. Creating a sense of family with the

BIG JOE'S MANAGEMENT APPROACH



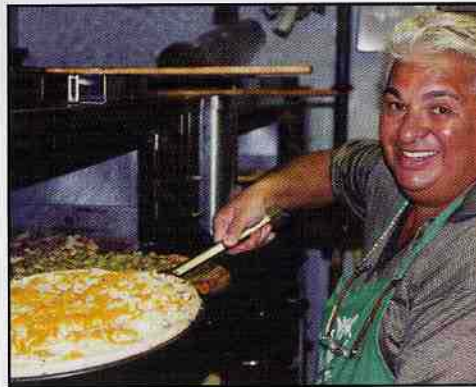
Big Joe can be serious and stern, when he needs to be.



And picky. He checks for quality and continuously teaches LaNova standards.



He jokes around even during the rush, but never stops preaching quality.



The results are spectacular. Great Pizza! Great Crew!

employees makes them feel like a part of the business, which also makes them take pride in the food they are serving up to customers. Creating a sense of family with customers lets them know La Nova appreciates their business and keep them coming back.

When we first visited the Todaros in the Fall 1998 issue, the article ended by saying that any pizza operator was welcome to drop by and get a tour of La Novas. Since then, they have simply had to stop giving tours. Pizza operators from all over the world were showing up to take a look. Now that the store is running like a top, here are some specific ways the Todaros are building sales. Let's take a look at some of the marketing strategies you missed in the first story.

Marketing Strategies

La Nova has established themselves as the place to go in Buffalo for pizza. Rather than spending money advertising and couponing, they have found other ways to create name recognition, which also contributes some additional revenues. They sell La Nova sauces, T-shirts, La Nova labeled bottled water not to mention selling slices in C-stores, bars and events like the Wingstock Festival.

1 THE T-SHIRT STRATEGY
La Nova is famous for giving away T-shirts to their customers. It's not just a one-time campaign with them. They do it constantly and have done it forever. Because of that, there are a lot of human billboards walking around Buffalo. They not only serve to advertise La Nova, they create a demand for the shirts and cause many people to walk in and buy them. When customers come in to the stores, they are confronted with a prominent display of different shirts that are for sale. Just think of how much more likely someone is to wear a shirt if they pay for it and sales of shirts help offset the costs of the free shirts.



Glass display case is an indispensable secret weapon in moving La Nova products.

2 THE WING COMBO STRATEGY

Wings weren't always a big seller for La Nova. Pizza was the original hook, but they did sell some wings. Eventually, they stumbled upon a way to get the wings sales jumping. The idea was simple: packaging. Here are some of the secrets if you want to begin building your reputation as the wing king in your area. Combine your large and one item pizza with a single order (10-12) wings. Call it what you think will work in your area. La Nova suggests Mini Pack. Don't coupon the

item, but create a menu item with the combination that is a focus. Highlight it without discounting it and see your ticket average rise without sacrificing profits. If you have success, increase your combination options with larger portions of wings with multiple pie sales.

3 THE SAUCE STRATEGY

When you go to La Nova, you can buy the same sauces they serve with their wings. What an image booster. This sauce must be good if customers are demanding to buy it. Some get it for free and are honored when they get a free bottle when they purchase a pizza.

Some Buffalo grocery stores even stock La Nova's sauces right on their store shelves. That's part of the image marketing that La Nova's does so well. Keeping the La Nova's mystique going.

4 WINGSTOCK FESTIVAL

Joey and 97 Rock started the Wingstock festival six years ago. What is it? Imagine Woodstock if they had Buffalo wings. Wingstock started out as a wing contest with Buffalo Restaurants and Pizzerias competing for Buffalo's Best Wings. After La Nova won the competition, the first two years, many restaurants, including the famous Anchor Bar didn't want to compete anymore. The solution was to change Wingstock from a competition into a wing tasting event. Wingstock is not only a good time; it raises money for a good cause. The event is open to the public and other charitable operators in the area also donate food and people to help serve the masses. Volunteers sell tickets to the event and the money raised at Wingstock goes to the Roswell Cancer Center. Since starting Wingstock, La Nova has helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for the can-



Display case built into lobby wall. Waiting customers have plenty of time to consider a purchase.

cer hospital. Paying customers get to sample wings and pizza from Buffalo's best.

5 THE WATER STRATEGY

Among the other ways La Nova has found to put their name out there, they even have their own bottled water. "We're not making a lot on the water," says Joey. "We were already selling a lot of bottled water, so we decided to offer bottled water with the La Nova name on the label. It's just another way to put the La Nova name out there." They sell the La Nova brand water in both pizzerias, C-stores and in some grocery stores. "We buy the stuff by the truckload," Joey says.

6 THE NIGHTLIFE STRATEGY

Buffalo, like your town, has nightlife and this group is perfectly suited for a pizza strategy. People party, get hungry and usually don't have a lot of choices late at night. In Buffalo, something quite interesting happened, and not by accident. Almost

all of the nightclubs within Buffalo's party zone began selling La Nova's pizza. Each night, every hour or so, La Nova drivers arrive and restock eight to 12 locations that are retail selling points. A nightclub generally has one person dedicated to handling the money. La Nova delivers the pizza at a discount and the nightclub sells them by the slice for a handsome profit. Some nightclubs even have expensive outdoor neon signs saying they sell La Nova's pizza inside.

Cover Shots



Wall in La Nova lobby shows they've made the front cover of three pizza magazines.

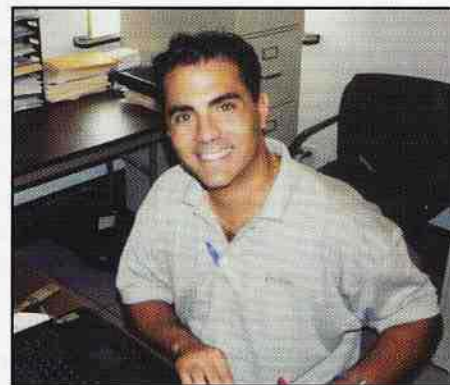
The La Nova Wing Empire



Michael Dentico,
Executive Vice President



Benny LaMonte,
National Business Development Manager



Sam Pantano,
Senior Manager of La Nova

There's no doubt that La Nova wings are a favorite in the town that created the Buffalo wing craze. Although La Nova Wings started their climb in 1994 to become a 30 million dollar a year business, the business really started as an argument between CEO Joey Todaro and his father many years earlier. Joey wanted his own identity. Dad finally gave his blessings and the rest is history. La Nova is the only company specifically dedicated to the pizza operator with wing solutions and

marketing ideas to make wings an easy and profitable transition. La Nova has no doubt lead the industry towards wings. After all, it was the competition that followed La Nova, not the other way around. Now, La Nova wings are supplied by more than 500 distributors internationally. They can even be found in local Buffalo grocery stores. To help cement the La Nova name in the minds of customers and to satisfy their desire to enjoy the same great tasting wings at home, La Nova

launched a line of signature sauces to go with the wings. They sell the sauces both at their stores and in grocery stores. Everything the Todaros have done lately seems to have been successful. How can one family have so much success? Is it really true that nothing creates success like success, or is it that the fanatic power of caring can create one success after another? "Watch the pie, and the rest will take care of itself."—Joe Todaro.

PMQ



Joey's Top 3 Tips for Making it through the La Nova RUSH.

#1-Be prepared.

Have enough dough and be sure your prep work is done.



#2

#2-Work side by side the crew.

Keeping them pumped and focused.

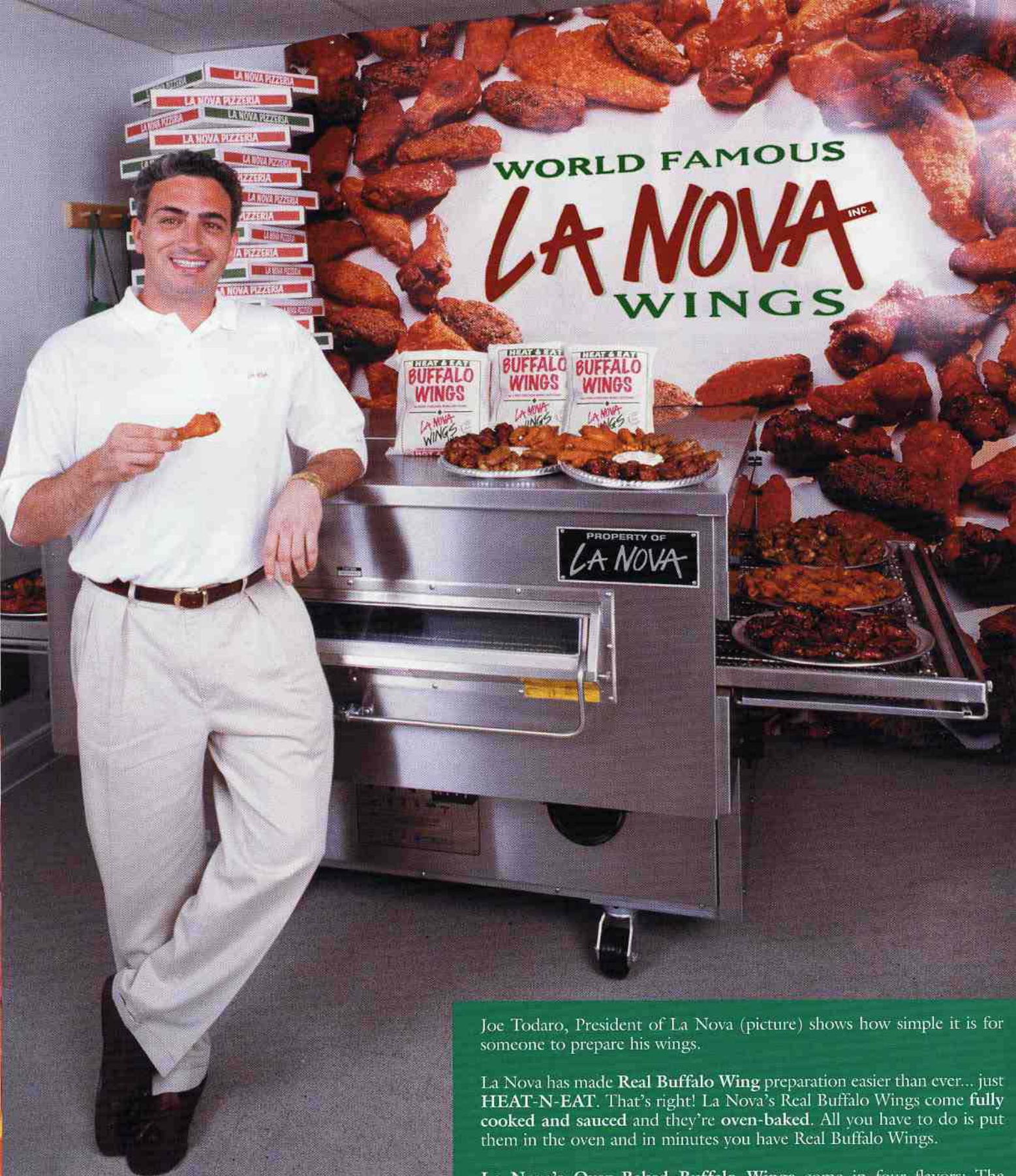


#2

#3-Turn up the Music.

Good rush music is upbeat or R&B. Don't forget Lovie Prima, Frank Sinatra & Dean Martin. That's how you keep sales going.





WORLD FAMOUS LA NOVA^{INC.} WINGS

Joe Todaro, President of La Nova (picture) shows how simple it is for someone to prepare his wings.

La Nova has made **Real Buffalo Wing** preparation easier than ever... just **HEAT-N-EAT**. That's right! La Nova's Real Buffalo Wings come **fully cooked and sauced** and they're **oven-baked**. All you have to do is put them in the oven and in minutes you have Real Buffalo Wings.

La Nova's **Oven-Baked Buffalo Wings** come in four flavors: The Original **Hot-n-Spicy Wings**, Our Signature **Bar-B-Que Wings**, The New Tasty **Italian-Style Wings**, and Our Plain **Oven-Roasted Wings**. The ease of preparation has made this product a favorite among the pizza industry.

Ask your distributor about **LA NOVA WINGS** or call us at 1-800-6LA-NOVA.

LA NOVA^{INC.}