

# PIZZA PARADISE

**Pizza Fusion** brings gourmet pizza and environmentally-friendly initiatives to satisfy diners and help save our planet—one pizza at a time.

By Tarre Beach

**W**hen you get a hankering for pizza, there's only one way to satisfy it. Get some pizza, quick. That often means either ordering up a wheel to be delivered to your door, popping a frozen one in the oven or making a run to a local pizzeria.

With the scheduled opening of **Pizza Fusion** in Dr. Phillips this month, your craving could also mean doing something good for the planet as well as your taste buds. Because Pizza Fusion is Orlando's only organic, earth-friendly pizza restaurant.

## Gourmet Pizza at Its Best

Owner **Sharon Adelhelm** says Pizza Fusion's philosophy about using all organically sourced ingredients and having its restaurants LEED (or "green") compliant isn't the only thing that led her to open the first Pizza Fusion in Orlando, located at The Fountains shopping center on Sand Lake Road. "My kids love this pizza. Their friends love this pizza. I love this pizza. Everyone that eats it loves this pizza. If this wasn't the best gourmet pizza I've ever had, I wouldn't be doing this," she says.

**J. Patrick Manney**, Pizza Fusion's general manager, says sometimes people hear the word organic and think it's going to taste like cardboard. "That just isn't the case," he says. "This is some really great tasting pizza." Having been born and raised in Italian influenced Providence, R.I., and as a graduate of the Johnson and Wales School of Culinary Arts, Manney knows a little something about pizza.

One of the first things people notice about their pizza is its unique oval shape. Baked on a stone surface and served on sustainable bamboo paddles, the thin, crispy crust is a perfect balance to the tangy sauce and gourmet toppings—such as organic pepperoni, free range chicken, Kalamata olives, Roma tomatoes and Portobello mushrooms.

The taste combinations in Pizza Fusion's premium specialty pizzas are equally distinguished. Very Vegan, BBQ Chicken, Big Kahuna, Philly Steak, Spinach and Artichoke, Greek, and Organic Eggplant and Fresh Mozzarella keep diners coming back for more.

Pizza Fusion also offers six signature salads, four delicious sandwiches and fair trade coffee and desserts—all organic or natural at a price point in line with other quick, casual restaurants. "The nice thing is that you can get good food that is affordable. You don't have to spend a lot to eat healthy," Adelhelm says.

## A Community Hub

Adelhelm, whose partners are her husband, **Mark**, and her neighbors, **Mike** and **Trina Day**, is extremely excited about the opportunity to become a community hub for Dr. Phillips residents and businesses. With a separate bar area stocked with organic wine and locally brewed organic beer, Pizza Fusion will be a perfect place to enjoy a light snack, meet for drinks and hold parties.

Sharon describes it as a comfortable gathering place with chic, environmentally friendly décor: "sort of like your favorite college hangout dressed up for grown-ups." Her vision for Dr. Phillips' new pizza paradise also



includes being a community partner.

"Education is my passion. I have three children in the Orange County Public School System, so I look forward to doing pizza fundraisers and pizza parties with an educational focus," she says.

Manney echoes Sharon's sentiment: "With an organization like this, we are encouraged to get involved. Everywhere in the restaurant, you see beautiful photographs and artwork with facts about organics and recycling and being a good steward," he says.



Dr. Phillips Pizza Fusion specialty pizzas (clockwise from top left): BBQ Chicken with free range chicken; Greek with Kalamata olives and feta; and Build Your Own Pizza with steak, bell peppers and gorgonzola.



COURTESY OF PIZZA FUSION

Owner Sharon Adelhelm and manager J. Patrick Manney have delivered Pizza Fusion to Dr. Phillips and will provide delivery service in environmentally friendly hybrid vehicles.

to eat pizza. Pizza Fusion is one of only a few chains in the country to offer gluten-free as well as lactose-free pizza. And vegans are rejoicing as well because Pizza Fusion also has a casein-free soy cheese pizza.

Pizza Fusion is living up to its motto: "Saving the earth, one pizza at a time." Making pizza and a delectable gluten-free brownie available to adults and children who normally wouldn't be able to have it can be seen as a healing act. And using chemical-free, organic, sustainable ingredients helps save the planet. But most importantly, Sharon says, the food tastes great.

Gluten-free pizza may be a godsend for those who have had to cut pizza out of their diets, but for those who just want to eat healthier, Pizza Fusion also offers a big bonus. During a presentation catered by Pizza Fusion, Mike explains that, "when people found out the food was organic and good for you, the pizza overshadowed my presentation."

As a mom, Sharon knows that finding healthy foods kids like to eat is like finding the Holy Grail. "Families are going to be so happy to come here and find something everyone likes. And Mom and Dad can feel good about it, too." **L**

### Gluten-Free & Healthy Eating

While Pizza Fusion may be fairly new, the brand is already making dreams come true for some of its diners. A growing number of Americans, especially young children, are gluten intolerant or suffer from Celiac disease, which forces them to abstain from eating wheat flour.

For these customers, Pizza Fusion offers gluten-free crust. Sharon tells how one customer called up a Pizza Fusion in tears, crying because she was so happy to finally get



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## PIZZA WITH A CONSCIENCE

JOE BROOKS/PHOTOGRAPHY

Pizza Fusion is a franchise based out of Ft. Lauderdale and opened its first store in 2006. Currently there are 20 stores in 11 states including Florida, California, Washington, Kansas and New Jersey. The company was recently nominated for the second time as a Top 10 Green Business of the Year by Co-op America.

As the industry's leading environmentally sound restaurant chain, Pizza Fusion practices "green" initiatives, including making deliveries in hybrid vehicles, something Pizza Fusion co-owner Sharon Adelhelm says is a great community outreach. "We plan to service a significant portion of the Dr. Phillips area with home delivery. As with everything we do, we want this to be an excellent service experience. For that reason, we will start with a small radius initially, and then rapidly grow to more broadly serve the community and the I-Drive hotel corridor. We want to educate the hotel concierges about our gluten-free menu items and lactose free pizza. There must be guests who could benefit from knowing we're here."

From the dining room to the kitchen and even the company's boardroom, Pizza Fusion strives to be a good corporate neighbor. It offsets 100 percent of its power consumption with the purchase of renewable wind energy certificates; it uses biodegradable take-away flatware and recycled paper products; and its marketing materials are all printed with soy ink. Not to mention guests can get a 25 cent rebate on all cardboard pizza boxes they return. In Dr. Phillips, they will also offer organic education classes for kids once a month to help teach younger patrons how using sustainable organics helps the earth.

Pizza Fusion locations often have cell phone recycling bins and other community projects that focus on health, fitness, education, sustainability or recycling. For his part, Pizza Fusion manager J. Patrick Manney is interested in starting a more prolific recycling program for the tenants at The Fountains shopping center. "It starts with one step at a time. Just think what will happen when this becomes second nature for everyone," he says. **L**