

Tuesday, January 16, 2018

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Fired-up flavor in Beaverton

□ Blair Stenvick □ ▾

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Food trucker Brett Tuft recently opened a wood-fired pizza joint in downtown Beaverton.



TIMES PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - Brett Tuft operated a wood-fired pizza truck in Beaverton for several years before opening Maiale Rosa.

3 Signs of a Fatty Liver



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Megan Braunsten grew up eating meat lover's pizza — those pies churned out by chains piled high with carnivorous toppings, pig and cow and fowl all together on one cheesy surface.

Then Braunsten, a development project coordinator with the city of Beaverton, tried a bleu cheese-topped, wood fired pizza from Maiale Di Volo, a food truck that often catered city events. The pie showed a good deal of restraint compared to a commercial meat lover's — and she loved it.

"I usually don't even like bleu cheese, so I was like, what is this?" Braunsten said. "This is one where you really get to taste each of the meats and the cheeses and vegetables individually, and it's worth it."

Maiale Di Volo was a passion project of Brett Tuft, who had quit his gig as the executive chef at Stockpot Restaurant, outfitted a 1937 Dodge with a wood-fired oven with the help of his wife Renee, and soon amassed a loyal following in Beaverton after opening in 2013.

Tuft brought 30 years of restaurant industry experience with him.

"Wood fired pizza — I just wanted to do it," Tuft said about his transition. "I wanted to get out of the fine dining rat race. I wanted to take what I learned from fine dining, and apply it to pizza."

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Tuft kept his eye on a Margherita pie in the oven as he spoke — and it wasn't outside on a food truck. It was inside his newly opened restaurant, Maiale Rosa, in downtown Beaverton's LaScala building.

Maiale Rosa, which opened on Nov. 14 and had its grand opening celebration on Dec. 6, was made possible thanks to Tuft's collaborators. Those included the city of Beaverton, which provided a grant through its Tenant Improvement Program to help Tuft outfit the restaurant with décor and a wood-fired oven.

For Braunsten, who helped Maiale Rosa secure the grant, bringing Tuft's restaurant to downtown Beaverton is a beneficial move for the city.

"To make a more vibrant downtown, bringing in new restaurants was the best thing we could do," she said. "Restaurants are really the top thing to help bring that vibrancy. And then really great retail and other fun places tend to fill in between the restaurants."

"It's really important to build character — we don't want to be the generic location with all of the box stores," added Liz Hannum, the executive director of the Beaverton Downtown Association. "People are looking for experiential living right now."

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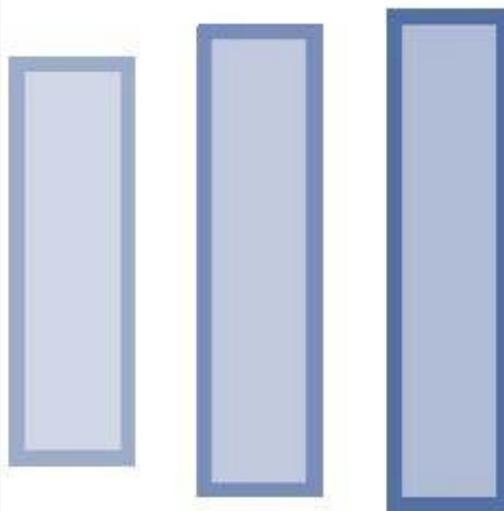
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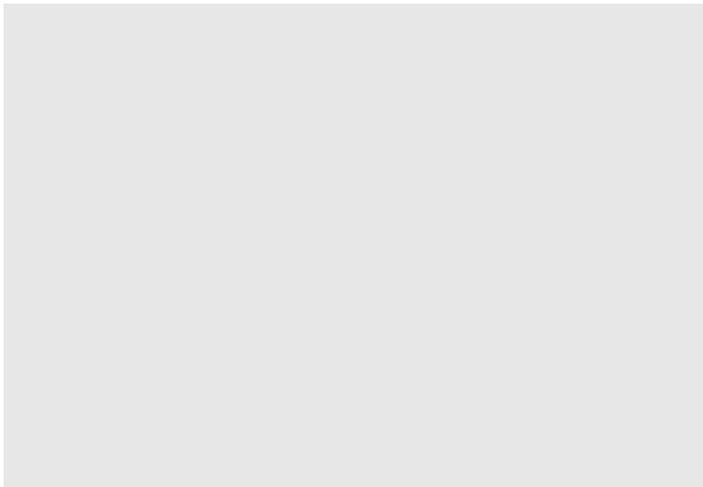


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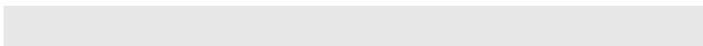
Hannum's favorite pie at Maiale Rosa is the Margherita, a classic and simple option with tomatoes, mozzarella and basil. A bite of Tuft's Margherita brings out the saltiness of the cheese, the gentle sweetness of tomatoes and a slight char on the crust.

"The speed, the quickness of it — you saw how quickly that one went," Tuft said when asked what makes wood-fired pizza special. "The dough's going to be lighter. You're going to get a little bit of smoke flavor, but not a ton. The dough's going to be more tender because there's more hydration. And it's how it was originally made."

"That's how I test if it's a good place — you've gotta have the Margherita first," Hannum said. "And it's amazing here."

Along with the city of Beaverton, Tuft also got help from investors Randy and Georgia Johnston. The couple were among his first loyal customers in the early food truck days.

"Every time we went to (Beaverton-based brewery) Uptown Market, he'd be parked out there and we'd go get pizza," Randy Johnston said. "We eventually talked to him and became friends. He told us his dream was to within five years open a brick-and-mortar. We told him, you know, we've got extra money if you need it, and we'd love to partner with you."



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Early this year, Tuft took the Johnstons up on their offer. They recently became vegan, so Randy convinced Tuft to include some vegan cheese options on the menu. After tasting a few different brands, they settled on locally-based Vtopia Cheese.

"They have the best mozzarella — we tried several, and it was the best," Johnston said.

Tuft sources almost all of his ingredients from local vendors, and he picks organic options whenever possible. He breaks down his own cheese to avoid the cellulose that comes with pre-grated cheese, and is very particular about his toppings.

"Pizza's simple, but it's very nuanced in its own way," he said. "You're only dealing with three things: dough, sauce, cheese. So you need to get the three of those to work together."

Maiale Rosa is a relatively small pizza joint — it includes a bar, where patrons can enjoy a glass of local wine with their pizza, and about a dozen small tables. Randy Johnston can see that changing in the future.

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"Right now the place might be a little too small for what we envision," he said. "I think it could be a great meeting place if it were larger. I want to see it expand and not just be a pizzeria, but a place where people could meet and have fun."

Tuft made his first pizza in his elementary school's cafeteria, and spent years firing up pies in the back of a '37 Dodge. Now he's slinging out his creations for a growing community of Westside patrons who are excited to have a locally-grown upscale pizza place as a lunch, dinner, snack or takeout option. He hasn't invested any funds into advertising or marketing, but things seems to be working out just fine.

"Yelp has been blowing us up," Tuft said. "We're definitely on our way."

Blair Stenvick

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