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Ellen Schmidt Las Vegas Review-Journal @ellenschmidt
Chef Floriana Pastore makes a pizza in her food truck, Signora Pizza. The pizzas are either fried or baked in the truck's custom wood-fired oven.



Elizabeth Page Brumley Las Vegas Review-Journal @EliPagePhoto
Owner Jinelle Batista picks up a customer's order from the YourPanadas empanada truck during a stop at Aviata Apartments.

A new wave of iron chefs

Pandemic helps drive Las Vegas' growing community of food trucks

By Al Mancini
Las Vegas Review-Journal

FLORIANA Pastore was a few minutes late opening the Signora Pizza truck on a recent Monday night because of Arts District road construction. By the time she rolled open the large glass windows of her trailer in front of Servezah Bottle Shop and Tap Room and fired up its rotating wood oven,

patrons already were waiting to order. She quickly prepared a Neapolitan pie for a pair of guests before moving on to a fried pizza.

"We are doing the fried pizza that looks like calzone and the wallet pizza that is folded in four," Pastore explains of her offerings. "And we do the regular sliced (pizza), the open one."

She calls her menu, which also

See TRUCKS 2F

▶ TRUCKS

Continued from Page 1F

includes stuffed zucchini flowers and fried strips of dough known as angioletti, “Neapolitan street food.” It’s as far from traditional food truck fare as her high-tech converted shipping container, custom built by her husband in Italy, is from a traditional food truck. Yet both are prime examples of Las Vegas’ increasingly diverse food truck community.

With the uncertainty and unease surrounding dining indoors, food trucks have been a particularly attractive option for many diners and chefs this year. That’s just one of the reasons you’ll find a wider variety of cuisines than ever represented in the more than 300 food trucks licensed to operate in the valley.

‘Restaurant on wheels’

As impressive as her truck may be, it’s not the way Pastore had planned to introduce Las Vegas to her cooking.

“In our plan, there is a pizzeria,” explains the four-time World Pizza Champion, who moved to Las Vegas late last year.

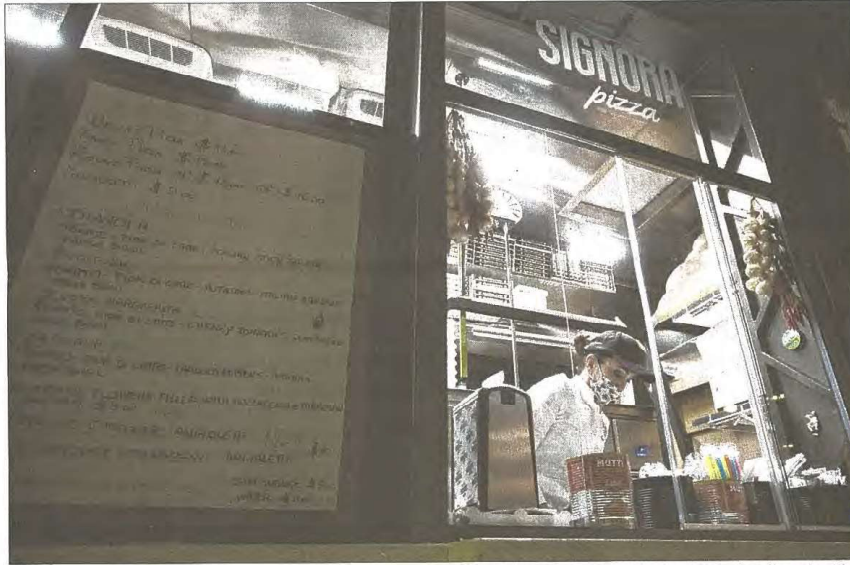
“Because of COVID, we said, ‘All right, let’s start with the truck.’ And maybe next year, as soon as I find a location that I like, we definitely will open a (brick and mortar) pizza/pasta concept.”

For Trisha Nuckles, who spent a decade making custom cakes in Las Vegas bakeries before launching her Cake Wagon truck last May, it was all about the numbers.

“I found that the most cost-effective and easiest way to get out there and reach more people would probably be doing something more mobile,” she says of her built-to-order dessert business. Moreover, she adds, customers have opened their minds to what a food truck can be.

“It’s not that roach coach mentality anymore. It’s really grown to fully getting an experience of a restaurant on wheels.”

When veteran chef Will Staten wanted to expand his Ragin’ Cajun Cookin’ catering brand, he decided the next step should be mobile cooking. His Cravin’ Creole food truck began serving gumbo and po’boys in park-



Ellen Schmidt Las Vegas Review-Journal @ellenschmidt
Chef Floriana Pastore’s husband built her high-tech food truck in Italy using a shipping container.



Elizabeth Page Brumley Las Vegas Review-Journal
YourPanadas cook Frank Lindsey fulfills an order.

ing lots across the valley over Labor Day weekend, as the first step toward a larger empire. While long-term goals include a line of home products, and even apparel, for now he believes trucks are what the market is craving.

“We are the answer that people have been looking for in this time period, just because people are scared. People are hesitant to do things in large groups, and being able to pick up your food to go — with your wife, your spouse, or your kids — is honestly the smartest way to go.”

During the early phase of the pandemic, when dining rooms closed and restaurants struggled to adapt to skyrocketing takeout and delivery orders, impromptu food truck gatherings boomed.

“In the beginning of the pandemic when everything was shut down, food trucks

were still up and running, and we could still park in different areas,” says Jonathan Batista, owner of the YourPanadas empanada truck. “Now bars and restaurants are slowly starting to open back up, and people are starting to go out and eat,” Batista continues. “And now they’re trying to crack down.”

Codes and regulations

The “they” to whom the chef is referring is a plethora of government agencies. On the federal level, they include the Department of the Interior, which issued letters this fall warning food truck operators against the commercial use of a Bureau of Land Management lot on the corner of Blue Diamond Road and Durango Drive. Locally, the Southern Nevada Health District is charged with enforcing county health regulations about where and when food trucks can oper-



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Pastore makes a Patatosata pizza.



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Empanadas from the YourPanadas food truck.

ate, as well as how many can band together for events, and under what circumstances.

“The tricky thing about trucks is that they have to fall under the health department regulations, and then the business license regulations also,” the SNHD’s Jacob Billing explains. “For ours, if they’re not at a special event, then they’re restricted to 30 minutes at one location, and they can’t operate within 250 feet of another vendor. So once there’s more than one, that would be cause for them to have to (apply for) an event coordinator permit.”

Billing says the rules haven’t changed since the start of the pandemic. He admits, however, that some existing regulations “are due for an update. Our regulations

haven’t been updated since 2010. Obviously, the food truck industry has changed a lot since then.”

Until changes are made, the SNHD allows trucks to apply for a waiver that will permit them to follow the more modern Nevada Administrative Code, which permits up to four hours in one location. Trucks also can apply for event coordinator permits that allow them to operate in clusters and after sundown, as long as there’s access to a restroom with running water.

One of the easiest ways for a truck to meet those requirements is to partner with a private business or organization that invites them to operate on their property and use their facilities.

“As a food truck, the easiest way that we’ve found to stay afloat and actually move upward is to partner up with the community in any way possible,” says Staten, whose regular stops for Cravin’ Creole include the parking lots of area hospitals, Boys & Girls Clubs and even a liquor store.

Batista agrees. YourPanadas makes regular appearances at Servehzah Bottle Shop and Tap Room as well as Henderson’s Bad Beat Brewing and Khoury’s Fine Wine & Spirits. And he recently made his first Friday night appearance at Aviata Apartments on Warm Springs Road, with the enthusiastic permission of complex management.

“Right now, during COVID, I think it’s especially important to engage with the residents this way,” property manager Gicelle Marengo says of the partnership. “You get off work, you can come pick up some food, go home and rest.” Batista is optimistic that through creative solutions like this one he’ll be able to spread the word about his cuisine without running afoul of laws.

“I just want to make a living the right way,” he says. “I cook great food. I put a lot of pride into what I do. For me to go out there and put my business in harm’s way because I didn’t follow the rules is just stupid. So, I try to stay on top of it.”

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Food truck owners recommend their favorites

By Al Mancini
Las Vegas Review-Journal

For many Las Vegans, there's never been a better time to visit a food truck. As traditional restaurants struggle with changing rules on occupancy, party size and reservations, the valley's hundreds of mobile cateries offer diverse cuisine in a drive-up setting that limits face-to-face interactions and eliminates the need to spend time indoors. Moreover, the variety of dishes being served out of truck windows is more expansive than ever.

So what's good?

The Review-Journal recently spoke to four local food truck operators about the challenges they are facing in 2020 and how they are responding. We also asked them for details on finding their trucks and for some recommendations on others that are worth a visit.

YourPanadas

Follow chef Jonathan Batista's YourPanadas truck at [@yourpanadas](https://www.facebook.com/yourpanadas) and [facebook.com/yourpanadas](https://www.facebook.com/yourpanadas).

Signora Pizza

Follow Floriana Pastore's Neapolitan street food truck at [facebook.com/SignoraPizzaTruck](https://www.facebook.com/SignoraPizzaTruck) and [@signorapizza](https://www.facebook.com/SignoraPizzaTruck). The website, [signorapizza.com](https://www.signorapizza.com), is expected to launch before the end of the year.



Elizabeth Page-Brumley Las Vegas Review-Journal @EliPagePhoto
Jinelle Batista calls out an order from her food truck to socially distanced customers.

What's your favorite?

If you have a favorite food truck you would like Al to know about, email him at amancini@reviewjournal.com with "Food Truck Pick" in the subject line.

Cravin' Creole

Those who want to try Will Staten's Louisiana cuisine can check out the "calendar of events" section at [cravincreole.com/calendar](https://www.cravincreole.com/calendar).

The Cake Wagon

Trish Nuckles' truck operates primarily as a private, event-based concept, but she says patrons can also "find us in small food truck gatherings around the valley from

time to time." Custom orders can be made at [thecakewagon.com](https://www.thecakewagon.com). Follow [@thecakewagonlv](https://www.facebook.com/thecakewagonlv), [facebook.com/thecakewagon](https://www.facebook.com/thecakewagon).

CHEFS' PICKS

Trish Nuckles

AlphaDawg: "AlphaDawg is known for their amazing hot dogs, but my favorite (dish) is their killer cheesesteaks and fries!" [@alphadauw_lv](https://www.facebook.com/alphadauw_lv)

Poppy's Quesadilla: "Veterans in the food truck game, and if you're lucky to spot them out, they've got a variety of delicious and creative options. My favorite is the pulled pork quesadilla — and street tacos when they've got

them." [@poppysquesadillas](https://www.facebook.com/poppysquesadillas), [poppysfoodtrucks.com](https://www.poppysfoodtrucks.com)

Jonathan Batista

The Cake Wagon: "Chef Trish Nuckles is an amazing pastry chef who launched a unique dessert truck that makes customizable sweets on the spot with a creative twist on the classics and attention to detail." [@thecakewagonlv](https://www.facebook.com/thecakewagonlv), [facebook.com/thecakewagon](https://www.facebook.com/thecakewagon), [thecakewagon.com](https://www.thecakewagon.com)

El Tamalucas: "Saul is putting out great food, the business is family owned and operated, but most importantly they built a following the right way and are becoming well-known around town." [facebook.com/ElTamalucas](https://www.facebook.com/ElTamalucas), [@eltamalucas](https://www.eltamalucas.com)

Floriana Pastore Chopperz Roadside Grill: "Chopperz is a family business. Chef Steve Bacchetta worked as a chef in several casinos and last year decided to move to a food truck business. His grilled gourmet sandwiches are yummy." [facebook.com/ChopperzRoadsideGrill](https://www.facebook.com/ChopperzRoadsideGrill), [@ChopperzRoadsideGrill](https://www.facebook.com/ChopperzRoadsideGrill) and [chopperzroadsidegrill.shopsettings.com](https://www.facebook.com/ChopperzRoadsideGrill)

Raging Tacos: "Raging Tacos is owned by two friends with a passion for food who started this adventure last year. They are already popular (thanks to) fresh, good ingredients." [facebook.com/RagingTacosLV](https://www.facebook.com/RagingTacosLV), [@ragingtacoslv](https://www.facebook.com/RagingTacosLV), [ragingtacoslv.com](https://www.ragingtacoslv.com)

Will Staten

Taste Temptations: "They serve carnival/fair-type desserts. From shakes to funnel cakes, they're something unique." [facebook.com/tastetemptationssd](https://www.facebook.com/tastetemptationssd), [@tastetemptationssd](https://www.facebook.com/tastetemptationssd), [taste-temptations.com](https://www.taste-temptations.com)

Maize Street: "The operators bring Cuban and South American/Latin flair to the valley, which is different than just regular street tacos. You can never go wrong with a great Cuban sandwich!" [@maize.st](https://www.facebook.com/maize.st), [maizest.square.site](https://www.maizest.square.site)