

From Brooklyn to boats



PHOTOS BY ANDREA KELLEY | THE JOURNAL

Anthony Barletta, owner of Pontoon Pizzeria, stands proudly in front of his pontoon-turned-kitchen on U.S. Highway 123 in Westminster.

Pontoon Pizzeria owner gives back to new community

BY ANDREA KELLEY
THE JOURNAL

WESTMINSTER — The Westminster Depot was hopping Sunday, full of children, gifts and holiday cheer.

Local nonprofit Upstate SC Get Snacked organized a day where kids could pack up and wrap a box of gifts. For more than three hours, families streamed through the Depot, taking photos with Santa, dining on food donated by area restaurants and reveling in the holiday magic.

But the magic started just down the road at Pontoon Pizzeria, where



A volunteer with Upstate SC Get Snacked takes a peek at one of Pontoon Pizzeria's Cheeto pizzas, which the restaurant donated for the nonprofit's holiday event on Sunday.

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PIZZERIA: 'Being down here, I kind of fell in love with the place'

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owner Anthony Barletta was methodically preparing 39 pizzas for the event.

Helping people in the community is part of Barletta's mission, whether it's donating food to events or sending a few pizzas to a neighbor in need.

"You wouldn't believe how many people and families call out and could use a little help. We're out of work. If anybody can spare anything, I'll send like five pies to the house. I don't think twice about this stuff," he said. "I love doing this. Helping people is my No. 1 thing."

Barletta has already built up a network, which is how he heard about Get Snacked's holiday event.

The woman who runs the shop next door is friends with Brandy Brockman, who started the nonprofit, and asked Barletta — who has a self-proclaimed soft spot for kids — if he would consider helping out.

"When she told me it was for kids, I says, 'I'm going



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Owner Anthony Barletta pulls a perfectly browned pizza from one of four ovens on the Pontoon Pizzeria.

to hook you up with a [lot of] pizza pie," he said. "I have cheese, pepperoni and about four of the pies, actually, I embedded Cheetos in. It's one of those things, it's a little thing, but it's a big thing to the kids. When you bite into the pizza and you hit the crunch — they just love it."

BROOKLYN TO BOATS

The inception of the Pontoon Pizzeria can be blamed on COVID-19. Brooklyn native Barletta met a man from Greer

made that too unwieldy, he quit his job in IT and permanently relocated to the Upstate.

Barletta "reinvented" himself and became Mr. Fix-it for a while, but when his shoulder started acting up, he began looking for easier options.

The answer came in the form of an abandoned pontoon boat on the lakeshore. He tracked down the owner and made a few calls, and soon Barletta was in business.

'A PLACE TO GO'

The ovens on the reputed pontoon stay busy cooking up Barletta's signature combo of "the best nature combo of 'the best sauce you can buy,' mozzarella cheese and parbaked woodfired crusts, along with poppers made from his Italian grandmother's secret recipe.

Barletta himself stays busy dreaming up the next phases of his operation, which he said is only 50 percent complete.

A water-worthy pontoon is already in the works, and he wants to add other food options to turn the pizzeria's slice of real estate into an outdoor venue destination.

"Westminster doesn't have anything even remotely close to this," he said. "What we're trying to do for the community is to give them a place to go, give them something to do. And that's the whole goal of what I want. Because nobody else seems to be wanting to do something like that. Everything shuts down at 10 o'clock here, you know? I'm open till 10:30 p.m. If there's more people coming, I'm staying open."

Barletta's "ultimate end game" is to transform the property into the "Westminster Food Court," with coffee, barbecue and maybe even a bakery.

"I got a million things going on at one time and I'm one man, and this is the problem I got," he said. "If I had partners, it would be phenomenal. But you know, I have people helping me out."

For now, though, he's working on adding delivery service to local schools and factories, and is in the process of getting EBT-certified so families can buy a meal at cost and pay using their EBT card.

"I like to build things, you know? It's in my blood," Barletta said. "Building things makes me happy."

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