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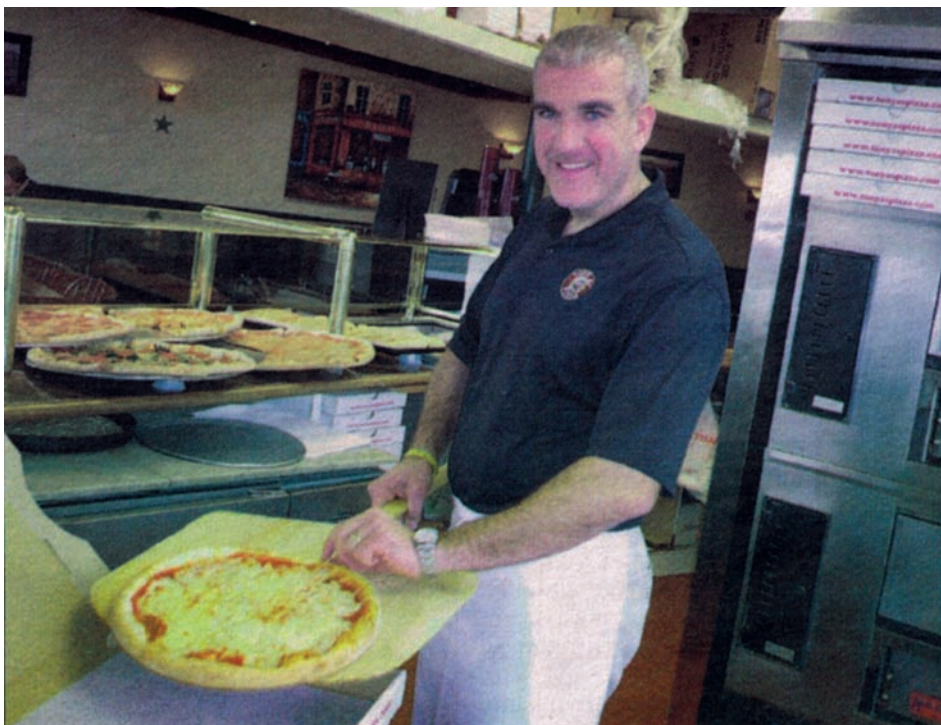
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PIZZA PLAN

He has a recipe for Tony Roni's franchises on his cutting board



Pieman has a peppy plan to franchise his Tony Roni's



Tony Altomare, owns four Tony A's pizza joints. He wants Tony Roni's to spread fast.

PETER VAN ALLEN STAFF WRITER

A Philadelphia-area pizzeria owner has cooked up some expansion plans — starting one shop at a time.

Tony Altomare owns Tony A's Pizza shops in Conshohocken, Blue Bell, Roxborough and Spring House.

Now, the restaurateur plans to roll out Tony Roni's, what he hopes to quickly turn into a chain of franchised pizza shops. The first one will open next month at 4504 City Ave. in Philadelphia, and Altomare hopes to open three others next year, in Center City, Havertown and Hatfield. "My learning ground is Tony A's, and I'm taking that to the franchise world,"

Altomare said.

Altomare hopes to attract franchisees willing to invest \$250,000 up front, but says he will open at least the first four with or without outside investors.

"We're going to be independent. We'll be a step above the mom-and-pops, but not in competition with Bertucci's or Panera. We'll offer a quick, efficient meal," he said.

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**Tony
Altomare**
Tony A's Pizza

Altomare took an untraditional route to pizza-shop ownership. The son of a Philadelphia police officer, Altomare grew up in the city and graduated from Roman Catholic High School and then West Chester University. He started his career, not in restaurants, but as an estate planner at Creative Financial Group in Newtown Square.

In 1996, a client convinced him to join him in the pizza business.

"I was a financial guy, he was a pizza guy," said Altomare. "His family owned pizza shops and he was from Naples [Italy]."

They started Altomeo Pizza in Wayne.

Altomare won't name the partner — and the partnership ended on a sour note, he said. But Altomare walked away with a deeper knowledge of the business and a thirst for more.

In February 1999, he opened the first Tony A's in Conshohocken, defraying expenses by offering to do labor on the restaurant's construction.

"I had them 'pay' me \$100 a day and I worked as a laborer, helping with plumbing, hanging sheetrock," he said.

The shop has since grown to four locations.

Managers at the locations are held accountable for quality and sales. In return for strong performance, they are eligible for profit sharing.

For Tony Roni's, Altomare hopes to attract franchisees with the same sense of responsibility. In return, the company will provide help with site selection, training programs, a detailed plan for operations, human resources support and, of course, the company's recipe for Neapolitan-style pizza, with a thinner, crispy crust.

"It comes down to work ethic and the culture," Altomare said. "It's about taking ownership in the job."