

ple times a week from Campagna and is sold out almost at once; and DiPalo's own homemade mozzarella, made fresh from the curds of cow's milk throughout the day, and its ricotta, made from the whey.

Today, Louis DiPalo, his sister Maria, brother Salvatore, their mother, Viola, and various sons and nephews, run the store with a Latino staff, today's equivalent, Louis explains, of the hard-working first- and second-generation Italian-Americans who built the store.

To work behind DiPalo's counter means knowing the 300 cheeses on hand, not simply as a service to customers but because DiPalo's is a living *catalogue raisonné* of Italian culinary art. "I am proud to be an American," Louis says, "but I am also proud of my heritage as an Italian immigrant." You sense this pride as you wait your turn and notice that no one leaves the counter without having sampled several cheeses, hams and oils, each described with respect to its region, whether it's made of cow's, sheep's or goat's milk and whether it's produced in quantity or by artisans encountered by Louis on his semiannual visits to Italy. DiPalo's, you discover, is a seminar.

These Old Country recipes are adapted from those passed down by Louis's grandmothers.

Eggplant Parmigiana

- 1 medium eggplant, about 3 inches in diameter, or 2 small eggplants
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup plain dried bread crumbs (preferably panko)
- 1 to 2 cups olive oil
- 1 ball (about 1 pound) fresh mozzarella
- 1 cup fresh ricotta (sheep's milk, if possible)
- ¾ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 to 2 cups Marinara Sauce (recipe follows)
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves, shredded
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh oregano, shredded.

1. Slice the eggplant into a dozen ¼-inch-thick rounds. Use a 3-inch round cookie cutter to cut out the center of each slice. Discard

the skin. Sprinkle lightly with salt and let sit in a colander for 30 minutes. Rinse and pat dry.

2. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Mix flour, dried oregano, salt and pepper on a plate. Add 1 tablespoon water to the eggs and beat with a fork. Spread bread crumbs on a plate. Heat 1 cup of oil in a skillet over medium heat until its surface ripples.

3. Working in batches of about 4, dust the eggplant rounds with the flour mixture and shake off the excess. Dip into the egg, drain off excess and then coat with the bread crumbs. Shake off excess crumbs and fry until brown on both sides, about 6 minutes. Drain on paper towels and repeat, using more oil as needed. (The eggplant can be prepared several hours ahead.)

4. Slice the mozzarella into a dozen ¼-inch-thick pieces; using the cookie cutter, cut into 3-inch rounds. Top each eggplant round with a mozzarella round. Mix the ricotta and Parmesan. Spread a little ricotta mixture on top of each round and then cover with a spoonful of the marinara sauce. Bake until the mozzarella melts and is slightly browned, about 5 minutes. (If the eggplant was fried earlier and refrigerated, bake for about 20 minutes.)

5. Place 3 rounds on each of 4 plates. Garnish with fresh basil and oregano.

Yield: 4 appetizers.

Marinara Sauce

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and diced
- 1 medium jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 can (about 24 ounces) San Marzano tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon chopped flat parsley
- 1 tablespoon fresh oregano leaves.

1. In a heavy 2-quart saucepan, warm the oil over medium-low heat and add the garlic and jalapeño, cooking about 5 minutes, just until the oil is infused with their flavors.

2. Drain the tomatoes, squashing them with your hands to break them up, and add them to the saucepan. Stir in the dried oregano and salt and pepper, and simmer over medium heat until lightly thickened, about 15 minutes. Stir

in the chopped parsley and oregano leaves. Adjust the seasoning.

Yield: About 3 cups.

Ricotta Cheesecake

- 3 pounds fresh ricotta
- 1 tablespoon butter, softened
- ¼ cup grated zwieback or biscotti
- 1 teaspoon plus 1½ cups sugar
- 6 large eggs
- 1 cup heavy cream or mascarpone, optional
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- Your choice of additional flavorings like 1 teaspoon Dutch-process cocoa powder dissolved in 1 tablespoon hot water, or ¼ cup chopped citron or 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest and 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice, etc.

1. Place the ricotta in a sieve over a bowl and let drain for 1 hour. Butter the bottom, sides and rim of a 3-inch-by-10-inch leakproof springform or plain round cake pan. Mix the grated zwieback crumbs with 1 teaspoon sugar and coat the pan.

2. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Place the ricotta in the bowl of an electric mixer. Beat at low speed until smooth. Beat in the eggs, 1 at a time, until smooth. Beat in the remaining 1½ cups sugar. Continue to beat until mixture is very smooth. Beat in the optional cream or mascarpone, vanilla and any desired flavoring. Pour into the pan and smooth the top.

3. Place the pan inside a roasting pan whose sides are not higher than the cake pan and add warm water to the larger pan to within 1 inch of the top of the smaller pan. Place pans in the oven and bake for 1½ hours, covering the top loosely with foil after 30 minutes. Remove and let cool to room temperature in the water bath. Lift pan out, dry it and remove the foil. Refrigerate overnight, and it will firm up.

4. To unmold, slide a thin knife around the cake edges. Release the sides of the springform pan. If using a plain cake pan, invert onto a large plate covered with plastic wrap, tap the bottom and the cake should slide out. (If it does not, soak a towel in hot water, wring it out and place it over the bottom and sides of the pan for 10 seconds.) Reinvert cake onto a platter. Refrigerate until serving.

Yield: 12 servings. ■