



by Mark Rumreich

Noble Roman's Pizza was founded in 1972 at the IU campus in Bloomington. The chain quickly grew to become one of central-Indiana's top pizzerias by 1985, when ads with Noble Roman's shaggy mascot promoting their 5-pound Monster Pizza filled the airwaves.

By the nineties, delivery and carryout restaurants had become



dominant in the pizza business, and competitors outflanked Noble Roman's by opening smaller, lower-cost locations that had little or no seating. Many of the Noble Roman's restaurants closed as a result of that trend.

Noble Roman's
 4930 N Pennsylvania
 253-1745
 Mon-Sat: 11AM-10PM
 Sun: noon-9PM
 www.nobleromans.com

In 1997, the company began reinventing itself by shifting to national franchise-based operations. Most of these are smaller locations, and many are in non-traditional sites such as manufacturing plants, airports, casinos and convenience stores. In 2004, Noble Roman's added Tuscano's sub shops to its repertoire;

there are now over 1000 franchisees from coast to coast.



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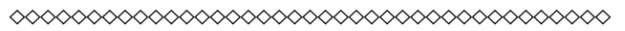
Broad Ripple Avenue was home to Noble Roman's for many years, but that location closed and is now home to another Bloomington pizza offspring - Pizza Express. We visited Noble Roman's at their 49th and Penn store. It's located with Tuscano's subs and TCBY Yogurt. Like many of the newer franchises, this store is geared for quick service and ready-to-go individual pizzas. There are a handful of tables along the front window, providing a scenic view of Pennsylvania Street.

In addition to 7-inch individual pizzas, you can order 14-inch regular-crust and 8 by 12-inch deep-dish Sicilian pizzas - sorry, the Monster is long-gone. Toppings include the usual favorites plus bacon, Canadian bacon, ground beef and green olives. Wild Side specialty pizzas such as Bell Pepper Chicken, Philly Beef and Cheese, and the Seafood Neptune pizza include some toppings not listed on the menu. Breadsticks, wings, pasta and salads are available too.

We ordered a regular-crust "Big Porker" with pepperoni, ham and sausage, and a deep-dish Sicilian with pepperoni and sausage. Forty-five minutes later, our pizzas were delivered to our table by an apologetic server.

The Sicilian has a very doughy crust, cheese and toppings next, and sauce dollops on top. The best part is the crispy outer edge from baking against the pan. I really like the sauce dollops too, but they can be overwhelming if you're not into sauce. This pizza had plenty of cheese and tasty nuggets of sausage, but the pepperoni was sliced razor-thin, making the pepperoni more for looks than flavor. Unlike the Sicilian, the regular-crust pizza was nothing out of the ordinary, and the thin pepperoni had an even harder time defending itself against both ham and sausage.

I miss the days when Indiana was saturated with big Noble Roman's restaurants loaded with booths, watching crusts being tossed and pizzas being made through the window to the kitchen and of course, the Monster. But nostalgia doesn't make for success in the pizza business, as Noble Roman's knows all too well.



Crossword solution
puzzle on Page Nine



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Mark Rumreich has been vigilantly surveying the pizza scene in the Indianapolis area for over two decades. He is an avid home brewer, has written for several magazines, and is the author of the just-released second edition of the Car Stereo Cookbook.



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