

# For 30 years folks savor flavors of Pop's

by Meg Sullivan  
staff reporter

There are many mouth-watering reasons local residents have been flocking to Pop's Italian Beef and Sausage in Palos Heights for almost three decades.

Whether one craves a tender beef sandwich, char-grilled chicken, piping hot cheese fries with a sprinkle of salt or an Oreo milkshake with chunks of cookie in it, Pop's is the place.

Pop's, 7153 W. 127th St., will celebrate its 30th anniversary in Palos Heights in March.

"I like the beef — they give you a little juice but it's not soaked," said Enid Powell, of Palos Park. "Portillo's is good too, but I like this the best. I get it with mozzarella and sweet peppers — isn't that how everyone gets it?"

"I long for a great hot dog," Powell's friend Judy Nicholas, visiting from Arizona, said. "We come here every time I come in."

Lisa Chionis, of Palos Heights, said she switches between two favorites. "My regular is a chicken sandwich on a bun with fries — can't forget the fries! Or else I get a Greek salad."

Frank Radochonski, of Palos Park, a father of four, opened

Pop's in 1980, after working at Duke's Italian Beef in Bridgeview for five years.

Some of his methods, such as enclosing fries inside the hot dog wrapper, he credits to his time at Duke's.

For those who think opening a restaurant is smooth sailing, think again. Radochonski has worked 70-hour weeks seven days a week for 30 years in order to oversee the operation of one of Palos Heights' most popular fast-food restaurants.

The beef used at Pop's is cooked for 3½ hours and sliced fresh every day, Radochonski said. "We use beef that has been tracked for two or three years and fed a special feed its last 100 days of life. We cook and slice it every day, it is not just generic it's quality."

Radochonski eats Pop's beef every single day in order to ensure perfect flavor for his customers. He said Italian sausage, which is delivered six to seven days a week to Pop's, also ranks on top of his list of favorite foods. "But I try not to eat that stuff too much," he laughed.

Speaking of, Pop's also offers an extensive variety of healthful cuisine, such as soups, salads, and chicken sandwiches, salads and pitas. "Our chicken is marinated,

tenderized and charbroiled before it is put on a pita or salad. There are a lot of steps."

Radochonski said hot dogs are the most frequently purchased item on the menu. "We sell the most hot dogs. If families come in, Dad buys a beef, mom buys a chicken and the kids all want hot dogs," he explained, adding that in his opinion Pop's has some of the best around.

He admits that keeping the business flourishing in a bad economy is challenging. "I'm trying to stay ahead of the curve. Costs are going up from taxes to minimum wage."

The disappointment in his voice is apparent as he talks about losing some of his most valued regular customers — construction workers and landscapers who are now unemployed. "Right now, we have lost the guys coming in with a two-by-four with their orders on it," he explained. "Usually for lunch you'd have those guys, but you've lost them."

Still, a steady crowd spilled into Pop's Monday afternoon, following a day at the Palos Heights pool or on a break from work to sit under the umbrellas on the outdoor patio and forget about the rat-race for a while. Mel Diab, owner of Running for Kicks across the street,



Photo by Meg Sullivan

Catherine DeCleene, of Hickory Hills (center) enjoys lunch with friends at Pop's Italian Beef and Sausage on Monday afternoon. Pop's will soon celebrate 30 years of business in Palos Heights.

crossed 127th St. with a bag in hand — probably his usual chicken sandwich on Vienna bread — to fuel himself for that evening's group run from his store.

Catherine DeCleene, a Stagg High School graduate, picked at her grilled chicken salad with Ital-

ian dressing and laughed so hard she spilled pop on her leg while enjoying a lunch with friends, including former Pop's employee, Caitlyn Hrebic, of Worth.

The Chionis sisters brought their cousins Blake and Kennedy Reichert, of Naperville, to Pop's for

the very first time. "The chicken fingers are good!" Blake said.

The smiles on customers' faces while enjoying their lunches probably gives Radochonski the motivation he needs to keep pushing forward with a longtime Palos favorite well into the future.