



**A SLIGHTLY
ABBREVIATED
HISTORY
OF ORLANDO'S
AND CAPROCK CAFE**

Feel free to take this to your table and read all about us. Just bring this back when you are done. Thanks for your business! The Orlando's and Caprock Café Owners

THE HISTORY OF ORLANDO'S AND CAPROCK CAFE

Once upon a time, in a far-off land called Brooklyn, there lived a little boy named Michael Frank Cea. Born September 6, 1930. Mike lived in a two-story house with several generations of an extended Italian family, including his mom, his dad, his kid brother, his aunt, his uncle, his grandmother, and his grandfather. These Italians knew how to eat, and none of the spaghetti and meatballs Mike ate ever came out of a can.

Despite the great Italian food and the big city lights, Mike had a longing for more sky, so in 1949 when he turned 19, Mike packed up his clothes, kissed everyone good-bye, cranked up his Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and drove down the highway across the nation to the sun-lit city of Albuquerque, New Mexico. On the way, Mike ran the Harley under a semi-truck, which broke his collarbone. After healing, Mike got a job at Bob's Drive-In flipping hamburgers, which, while not the most glamorous food-service job around, convinced Mike this was a business he could love. He worked at Bob's Drive-In for two years, and was said to have made the best hamburgers.

In 1951 Mike got a more glamorous job in the nightclub business in Albuquerque with some other Italians, Frank Vengalia and Leonard Li-Petra, whose Vena's Nightclub on Central Ave. was quite a hot spot. In 1954 Frank and Leonard started the Casa Luna Italian Restaurant in Albuquerque further down on Central Ave. Leonard invented most of the recipes, but Mike helped with many of them, along with Frank and the bosses' wives. I don't know if you can imagine five Italians agreeing on anything but finally they did. Mike went from the nightclub business to running the new restaurant for Frank and Leonard.

Mike got married in Albuquerque to a lovely Irish lady named Joan, had son David in 1958, and daughter Katie in 1961. When Frank wanted to expand to Las Cruces, New Mexico, Mike moved his family there, where the Casa Luna Italian Restaurant opened in 1962. (This Casa Luna is still in business today--the other locations have closed.) In 1963 Leonard opened the third Casa Luna in Roswell, New Mexico. In 1964 Leonard talked Mike into coming to Roswell to help him run the store, so Mike moved the family again.

Working for Frank and Leonard was good but Mike had always wanted to own his own restaurant, so when a cheese supplier named Phil Decato told him glowing stories about the opportunities in Lubbock due to Texas Tech University Mike decided to take a closer look during the trips back east to see the family. Phil had told him about a former convenience store on Highway 84 (Avenue Q) that was now an out-of-business auto glass shop. Mike looked at it, thought it would work just fine, and signed on the lease. He began driving back and forth to Lubbock from Roswell as he put the finishing touches on his own store. Mike moved the family to Lubbock in August 1965.

Frank and Leonard told Mike he could use all the recipes as long as he called his new restaurant something besides Casa Luna. Orlando's Pizzeria and Italian Restaurant opened in Lubbock on October 15, 1965 at 2402 Avenue Q, named after Mike's maternal grandparents. If you look closely at the front windows on the right you will see that they are really sliding glass doors from the old convenience store.

Joan helped Mike as a lunch cook, waitress, and bookkeeper. David who was nine began his food service career bussing the tables for 85 cents an hour, graduating to doing the dishes at thirteen years old. David and Katie used to sleep on makeshift beds of blankets on top of tomato paste cases in the storeroom while their parents worked. The original kitchen is where the bar is now, and there were no other rooms except the main room. No liquor was served because Lubbock didn't vote in liquor by the drink until 1971. The kitchen was exposed, and everyone could see Mike making the pizzas and cooking the pasta.

Mike met lots of people at the counter and was a familiar sight driving around town in a cowboy hat in his gold Chevrolet Corvette. On weekend nights the lines would stretch for blocks as people waited to get inside for a table. The candles were in old wicker wine bottles with years of colorful wax on them--the fire department outlawed the candles because they kept setting the paneling on fire. The pizzas to-go were wrapped in foil and placed in white millinery bags just like the New York pizza shops did. Mike delivered his entire menu from day one, which was very popular with the Tech students.

In 1971 Mike built a new kitchen building behind Orlando's--in it he placed a pizza oven with sawed-off legs so David who was now 14 could reach inside and cook the pizzas. The Casa de Vino Lounge was built where the old kitchen was to take advantage of the passage of liquor by the drink. Booze had come to Orlando's and Lubbock--it was the start of a restaurant boom that continues to this day.

One of Mike's favorite stories about Orlando's was when a customer driving a Cadillac failed to stop and crashed through the front of the building into the cashier stand. Fortunately no one was hurt but the cashier was always kind of jumpy after the incident. Families brought their little children in to eat spaghetti, and today those children are bringing their own little children in to eat spaghetti. Couples who got engaged in an Orlando's booth frequently come back to celebrate the start of their relationship. People who have moved away from Lubbock return and are happy to see that Orlando's is still there and serving the Italian food they remember.

My earliest memory of Orlando's is when I ate there as a freshman in 1972 while attending Texas Tech. I remember it was Bob Brauer who lived on my floor who told me that we had to go eat there. Bob and some other friends went down to eat the Small Beef Pizza for \$2.00. I had no idea at that time I would be involved with Orlando's some day.

I graduated from Texas Tech in the bicentennial year of 1976, and went traveling through the United States, sleeping in my VW Bug, and moving furniture for Allied Van Lines for money. I drove into Atlanta with \$1.00 and a quarter-tank of gas. I had many interesting experiences that I will never forget. I came back to Lubbock in the winter of 1977 to stay. I was born and raised in Fort Worth but Lubbock's small-town environment had gotten under my skin. My first regular job after college was with the Texas Tech art department as a nude model for \$5.00 an hour. I then got a job with Tom's Toasted Peanuts as a route salesman. To make extra money I started baking loaves of whole wheat bread at my house and delivered them while still warm to a route of about 30 people. This was my first venture into food-service besides peanuts. I called it "Burrhead's Bread", based on my nickname.

I was a student of natural living (health-nut) and my dream was to open a natural food store called the Alternative Food Company. The first Realtor I called about a location said he had nothing suitable. The second Realtor I called said he had no suitable locations either but he did know of an Italian restaurant that was looking for a partner. I decided to meet to discuss the details and that's when I met Mike Cea.

At that time Mike's son David was studying to become a forest ranger and had no interest in staying with the family business. Mike told me that he needed a partner if the business were to grow, and in true Italian style, made me an offer I could not refuse. For \$2,000 and signing on the dotted line for \$35,000 in bank debt, I became a half-partner with Mike and we had ourselves a restaurant partnership. My first day as an Orlando's partner was June 2, 1978. That was a Friday, and Orlando's did \$649.53 in sales for the day.

My former college roommate Morris Fitch had become an expert carpenter by that time, so he designed and built the bar and the new waitress room connecting the kitchen, as well as many other projects. I had met Morris in 1973 because the Texas Tech Housing Department computer by chance had assigned him as my roommate instead of the person I had requested. After we met for the first time at Tech, Morris and I went down to the parking lot and shared a few ice-cold Michelobs--illegal, but tasty nonetheless. Gary King, Buffalo Beano's owner at the time, was a friend and an electrician, so he helped us rewire the place. Customers would be eating lunch listening to the hammering and sawing going on behind an old parachute. The food must have been good because they kept coming anyway, despite the dust.

In 1979 Orlando's became a corporation. In 1980 I opened the Alternative Food Company in the south building attached to Orlando's and sold rebound exercisers and food storage programs from Arrowhead Mills. I gave weekly health lectures and dinners. My business card at the time read "Holistic Health Consultant." I tried to teach everyone that the key is balance, and not going to the extreme, like swearing off pepperoni pizza. An interesting piece of local trivia is that the south building was the original location of Gandalf's Staff, the first head-shop in Lubbock.

One day while I was bartending at Orlando's a pretty female Texas Tech student named Karen came to Orlando's bar and asked me for a copy of our menu. I produced one for her, and we stood talking while she ate all the samples of the banana nut bread I had baked. I invited her to play racquetball the next day. Lia Johnson, a waitress at the time, looked at me and said "You've got it BAD!" She was right--it was love at first sight. We played racquetball and Karen beat me. I decided to marry her before she could hurt anyone else. We got married in Fort Worth in 1981, as she was from Fort Worth too, although we met for the first time at Orlando's bar. Karen started working as a waitress at Orlando's while she finished Texas Tech, looking to get a psychology degree. I later found out Bobby Skibell the former owner of Gardski's Loft had sent her out to score our menu for his market research--thanks Bobby!

In 1981 Orlando's needed the extra room so I closed the natural food store next to Orlando's and created a new dining room. With Morris Fitch and my wife as partners, The Alternative Food Company moved to 2611 Boston in the old post office and became a full-line natural food store. My wife Karen provided the \$7,000 capital I needed by letting me use the settlement she was awarded from a car wreck that hurt her leg when she had stopped at an accident and was standing on the road. Karen will tell you not to stand on the side of the road by a parked car. We operated the Alternative Food Company until 1984 when we sold it. The Alternative Food Company is still in operation under the watchful eyes of new owners and has greatly expanded.

Jerol Fanta was the general manager for Mesquite's restaurant on Broadway and a Texas Tech Restaurant, Hotel, and Institutional Management (RHIM) student when David Cea came to see him in the summer of 1982. David wanted a part-time job to give himself a change of scenery from Orlando's. Jerol hired David and they became friends. David told Johnny Yowell, the manager of the Ave. Q location at the time, that Jerol would like to work for Orlando's. Jerol came to work for Orlando's as a cook in the fall of 1982. The second day Jerol was working at Orlando's, David Cea was on his way to take his fall final exams at Tech, when he was involved in an accident on his motorcycle near the Tech coliseum. A lady made a left-turn into him, knocked him 30 feet, and broke his leg in four places, cracked 3 ribs, cracked his pelvis, and crushed 2 vertebrae. David spent the next 14 weeks in bed and in a cast.

Jerol stepped into the role of running the kitchen. I was gone most of the time because I was managing the Alternative Food Company. My wife Karen worked her way into the general manager position at Ave. Q. After he got out of the hospital, David decided to stay with Orlando's and switched his major to RHIM. Eventually both David and Jerol graduated from Texas Tech with a degree in RHIM. After we sold the Alternative Food Company in 1984 Jerol became a partner by investing in, opening, and managing the second Orlando's in Westwood Shopping Center at 5404 4th Street in September of 1984. This store eventually expanded into the space next door as business increased dramatically.

In 1986, I was attending Abundant Life Church on 34th Street under the pastorship of Billy Gibson. Ted Bush was attending there, and he introduced me to his sister, Lisa Cox. I asked Lisa if she knew anyone who was interested in a secretarial job. Lisa said she sure was, but that she had no secretarial experience. I said I didn't want anyone with bad habits anyway, so I hired her on the spot. After 12 years with us as corporate secretary, in September 1998, Lisa decided to take a job with another business, and she left with a whole lot of experience behind her, including my instructions in the art of sarcasm.

Heather Fanta, Jerol Fanta's wife, who had worked with Lisa in the corporate office for two years, took over the duties with Loyd when Lisa left. About a year later, in October 1999, Cheryl Cea, David Cea's wife, started working at the corporate office, so it became a real family affair. Working at Orlando's was a reunion of sorts for Heather, for she had worked at the Orlando's on Ave. Q in 1981 as a server.

Riding high with a great team, in the summer of 1989 we decided to open a third store in the old J. T. McCord's building located at 6951 Indiana Avenue. Jerol Fanta bought into the corporation by trading in his partnership at the 4th Street store. In October of 1989 the third store opened. An unanticipated effect was that half of the business from the second store started patronizing the new store. Costs ran high at the new store due to our management team having to learn a higher volume operation.

In the summer of 1990 five new major restaurants opened, including the Olive Garden, our first national Italian restaurant competition in Lubbock. We decided to consolidate even though the second store was making money. We closed the 4th Street store in September 1990 at the end of our lease in order to devote more attention to the new Indiana location. This decreased our overhead greatly, and soon we were doing more sales with two stores than with three. We call this difficult period for the corporation the "Black Summer of 1990" as we lost \$146,000 that year—of real money!

Karen began running the Orlando's Ave. Q location, and David and Jerol co-managed the new Indiana location in order to get costs under control.

In June of 1994 a cigarette butt thrown into a bar trash can set the Indiana location on fire after closing, destroying a wall and smoke-damaging the entire building. A lot of people rallied around us and we were open in a little over two weeks. The fire, while traumatic, gave us a chance to redecorate. We now have fire-resistant trash cans in the bar.

In 1995 the corporate team formed a new corporation, CapRock Restaurants, Inc., and two years later, on September 8, 1997, the Caprock Café opened at 3405 34th Street, Lubbock, Texas, with David Cea moving over there to be the owner/operator. That little juke joint has become a favorite watering hole and burger-eating place for lots of

hungry Lubbockites. This explains why you see some advertising for CapRock Café on the Orlando's premises and on our take-out cups and sacks.

On September 24, 2000, Mike Cea, the founder of Orlando's, David's dad, and my partner of 22 years, died in Lubbock, at the age of 70.

In October of 2001 I hired Adrian Crosby, who was a former cook, bartender, delivery, and manager for us, to be my corporate assistant. Adrian had done just about everything else for Orlando's since he was originally hired back in 1996. Adrian was a Texas Tech Management Information Systems student, and quickly learned enough to make himself quite handy. After Adrian graduated from Texas Tech in December 2002 with his MIS degree, he became the corporation's Chief Information Officer (CIO). Adrian has an office next to mine in the corporate office. He's a quick study and has even started learning some of my warped sense of humor. I am sure you will see Adrian about the premises working on the computers and much more.

On October 18, 2001 the Orlando's Avenue Q location expanded into its new dining room and bathroom addition, greatly improving the customer experience there. The two back booths in the main dining room that are behind the wall with a window frame in it are located where the old bathrooms were, so you can see how tiny they were! Loyd still goes into the Ave. Q store and asks to be seated in the "new" room.

On September 2, 2003 the Orlando's Indiana Take-Out Market opened, with a separate delivery and take-out kitchen to serve the growing demand for Orlando's products in Southwest Lubbock. This has been a huge success, as it enables customers to get their food much faster, and you know how slow it can seem when you are hungry.

On December 1, 2008, after many years of planning and development, the new Caprock Café opened up in Rockridge Plaza at 82nd and Slide. We decided to create "Lubbock's first Smoke Free Sports Grill" due to the change in customer preferences that have occurred during the last decade. That new southwest location quickly became a favorite eating and drinking place for that side of town and Wolfforth.

On July 5, 2011, Caprock Café on 34th Street went Smoke-Free as well, making both Orlando's and both Caprock Cafes smoke-free. Food sales at Caprock Café 34th increased so much we had to buy a new refrigerator and a new freezer! Families started bringing their kids in to eat again. The smoking drama is now behind us, and most of our smoking customers have forgiven us, as they understand the reasons for our decision.

Orlando's and Caprock Café's growth through the years has been phenomenal, which is attributable to a very simple management philosophy--we treat people like we would want to be treated whenever possible. Experts have tried to find more complicated management techniques but I think a servant's attitude is the foundation for a successful restaurant operation. The lawyer asked Jesus what was the greatest

commandment in the law. Jesus said to him "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." This heavenly advice applies to dealing with more than customers--it applies to employees, vendors, servicemen, contractors, and all other people we come into contact with during our lives. When we fail in this endeavor, as all humans are prone to do, we sincerely try to make things right again.

We want to thank all of Lubbock for the past years of their excellent support, and we want to continue to serve you for many years to come. We love it when you come to Orlando's or Caprock Café and enjoy yourselves. I'll leave you with a quote I've always loved very much. It is from Henry David Thoreau, who wrote WALDEN:

"To affect the quality of the day,
that is the highest of arts."

May Orlando's and Caprock Café continue to affect your days in Lubbock in a most pleasant way!

Thanks for being such a large a part of Orlando's and Caprock Café's success!

Loyd L. Turner, President
Orlando's Enterprises, Inc.
CapRock Restaurants, Inc.
Updated December 17, 2009