

ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORTH PARK

PAESANO RESTAURANT

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Eleven years ago, the July 1998 issue of the *North Park News* featured a story about Paesano Restaurant, a North Park favorite. It seemed like a reprise was in order, so when Vince Romano stopped by our table to ask how our food was, I asked if I could interview him and he graciously agreed. Here's a summary from that interview and the news article "At Paesano's Restaurant, Five Generations Call North Park Home," written by Thomas Shess as part of the "What's Right about North Park" community news section of the paper.

Vince Romano and his wife, Antonietta (Toni), first opened their restaurant in 1967 at 3830 Ray Street. The Mission Revival building was originally built in 1928 and served as the North Park post office for nearly 25 years. Paesano Restaurant was at this location for five years.

In 1972, the Romanos purchased a parcel at Landis and 30th and had the restaurant we see today built to Vince's design. He put the kitchen at the entrance so he could see what was going on, even when cooking or throwing pizza. That way he could run the restaurant by himself. He modeled the exterior to look like the restaurant in Montreal where he worked before coming to the U.S. The Montreal restaurant was also named Paesano. Vince likes the word, which means "good friend," and is what you call a compatriot you haven't seen in a long time when you meet again and have forgotten his real name.



RAY ST. ORIGINAL—Here's the first Paesano Restaurant, opened in 1967 on Ray St. in North Park between University and North Park Way. Paesano's was housed in North Park's original post office.



Current Location of Paesano's Restaurant at Landis and 30th Streets

The new location for the restaurant was instantly popular. It got so busy, customers helped Vince serve. Then Toni and their son Joe started working there. Now Joe is the owner, so the restaurant is still in the family, and Vince still comes there often to make sure everything is done right.



The Isle of Ponza, Italy

The July 1998 *North Park News* article told the romantic story of how Toni and Vince were born and raised on the island of Ponza, just off the west coast of Naples, Italy. Everybody knew everybody in the villages on this small Mediterranean fishing isle.

Toni's parents left Ponza for Canada in the mid-1950s, taking young Toni with them to Windsor, Ontario. Vince, who was a fisherman and machinist on a fishing vessel, missed the beautiful Antonietta and wrote to her. Via these letters, he proposed and she accepted. Vince came to Windsor in 1956 and the couple married.

When Vince arrived in Canada, his English was only good enough to be able to say, "You have a job for me?" But he couldn't understand the answers to his question, so he would stand silently and then say the only other words he knew, "thank you," and leave. He finally got work building mobile homes in the summer and cooking in the kitchen of a friend's restaurant across the border in Detroit during the winter when there was no construction.



Wedding Photo, Vince and Antonietta Romano, 1956



FULL HOUSE—Here's the five generations of the family began by Concetta and Joe Califano. Top row, left to right: Silvia Romano, Shelley Romano, Joe Romano, Toni Romano, Vince Romano, Jeremy Collins, Vesta Collins, Cathy Romano Alwan and Sabah Alwan. Seated (L-R): Concetta Califano holding Quintin Romano and Joe Califano holding great, greatgrandson Zayne Collins. Front row (L-R): Zaynab Alwan, Fatima Alwan and Mustaba Alwan. See story on page 10.

Vince and Toni lived in Windsor for five years and then in Montreal for five years. In the late 1950s, Toni's father, Guisippie (Joe) Califano, became a U.S. citizen and moved to San Diego. He sponsored the couple to come to the U.S. In 1966, Vince and Toni moved to San Diego and settled in North Park with their three children, Cathy, Joe, and Silvia. Although Vince and Toni now live in Del Cerro, they come to North Park often. Vince loves to walk in the area, and is happy to see the renaissance that is happening with new businesses and restored buildings.