

# Eats

## Tony's serves up 'The Perfect Pizza' and more

By SCOTT HAWKINS

schawkins@sunherald.com

**GULFPORT** — On a recent Friday evening, downtown was busy here, especially along 14th Street with cars lined up in front of the Port City Cafe and across the street in front of Tony's Brick Oven Pizzeria.

Inside of Tony's, the floor was hopping with waiters and waitresses taking and delivering orders for customers at tables on the floor or in booths along the walls.

A birthday party of kids playing with dough was seated at the bar overlooking a giant brick oven where bakers were preparing pizzas, sliding them into the oven and pulling them out with melted cheeses and crispy crusts.

Even though it was a busy evening, it wasn't too busy to get a seat at a booth. A friendly hostess sat me immediately and a waitress brought me a drink and a menu. While perusing the menu, I was struck by the cleanliness of the hardwood floors, and the richness of the brick walls and glass front that opens onto downtown Gulfport.

The menu was simple. "Pizzas: Our 12-inch pizzas are prepared with fresh ingredients atop our homemade sauces and pizza dough," the menu reads just above listing six styles of pizzas, including "The Perfect Cheese" for \$6.95; "The Perfect Pepperoni" for \$7.50; "Veggie Pizza" \$8.25; "Margherita Pizza" for \$7.95; "Pesto Pizza" for \$11.95; and "Meat Lovers" for \$12.95. Customers can also mix and match various toppings, sauces and cheeses to create their own perfect pizza.

The menu offers three of Tony's homemade sauces including Marinara, Pesto or Rustic Tomato and there are sub sandwiches for \$6.95 and pasta dishes for \$6.95 and \$7.95 as well as a house salad and cakes for dessert, and beers and wines.

I ordered "The Perfect Pepperoni," which is "The Perfect Cheese" pizza topped with Tony's marinara sauce and Italian four-cheese blend — pro-



Tony Swigris, owner of Tony's Brick Oven Pizzeria in downtown Gulfport, shows The Perfect Pepperoni pizza.

PHOTOS BY SCOTT HAWKINS/SUN HERALD

### If you go

**What:** Tony's Brick Oven Pizzeria

**Where:** 2417 14th Street, downtown Gulfport

**When:** Monday-Thursday 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

**Specialties:** Brick-oven pizzas with fresh ingredients and homemade sauces; pasta dishes; and sub sandwiches; beer and wine. Dine in or carry out.

**Contact:** 868-9877

volme, mozzarella, Romano and Parmesan — with pepperoni.

Husband and wife Tony and Beth Swigris opened Tony's on Dec. 28.

"We're just grass-roots," Tony said. "In Gulfport, there is basically one other pizzeria other than a chain."

So far business has been good, Tony said, with a good lunch crowd from downtown and the evenings benefiting from downtown's burgeoning nightclub scene.

"We see a lot of familiar faces," he said. "Repeat customers are always a good sign."

When my "The Perfect Pepperoni" arrived, it was beautiful, and biting into it was great — crispy on the top, nice, sweet



Tony's Brick Oven Pizzeria was hopping on a recent Friday evening.

marinara, tasty cheeses and a crispy crust outside that was soft inside. A perfect pizza, indeed.