

## Featured Chef: Cory Lattuca

Written by Interview and photography by Debby Wolvos

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### Executive Chef Cory Lattuca of Grimaldi's Pizzeria.



**AFM:** Your title is Corporate Chef and Food and Beverage Director for Grimaldi's Pizzeria. What are some of the things that you are in charge of?

**CL:** Food, first and foremost. My main job is maintaining the high quality and standards of that was first adopted in the original Grimaldi's. Too many concepts drift away from what makes them great. I'm also responsible for our ingredient selection and recipe development, as well as managing supplier relationships. Annually I redevelop our beer, wine and non-alcohol beverage program. If that is not enough, I also dabble with IT and our POS system. I like to think of myself as the company's do-it-all guy.

**AFM:** While getting your degree at Scottsdale Culinary Institute, you got a job at Grimaldi's Pizzeria as a waiter. How did the guy who was studying classical French cooking end up staying at Grimaldi's for a decade?

**CL:** When I was first offered the position, I considered turning it down and sticking to my classical French roots, but in the end, I really, truly believed in the concept and the product. I wanted that opportunity to be on the ground floor of a growth concept and make it into a successful venture. Now 10 years later, I look back and I have loved every moment of it.

**AFM:** We understand that your love for cooking started when you helped your grandmother prepare meals. Tell us more about that.

**CL:** I had two incredible women that inspired my love of food. My grandmother was a little old Italian woman. She lived in a house with a kitchen on the main floor but the real cooking happened on an ancient stove downstairs in the basement. At a young age, I was put in charge of the sauce and my earliest cooking memories are standing on that chair, stirring that sauce.

My other grandma was a French woman from Mississippi. She loved fresh seafood and we used to trek down to the gulf and catch our own. I'd watch her make some incredible gumbos, stews and etouffees. I grew up tasting some of the most incredible southern and Italian food. How can that not inspire a lifetime love of food and cooking?

**AFM:** Born in Rochester, New York, raised in in Salt Lake City, Utah, career in Scottsdale, Arizona. If you could live anywhere else in the world, where would it be and why?

**CL:** Along with loving food, I love great wine. Annually, my wife and I make the trip to Napa. It would be incredible to retire in my own personal vineyard one day and laze away my days.

**AFM:** We understand that you like to hit the golf course.

**CL:** (Laughs) Yes, I originally got into golf because how can you not living in Arizona? Everywhere you go is one incredible course after another. I used to ski while living in Utah and now I golf because I live in Arizona. I do have to say I have negotiated some pretty fantastic vendor contracts on the course. I'd say I am a pretty passionate golfer but equally terrible. But I'm improving every day!



**AFM:** Do you bring pizza home for your wife and daughters? How old are the girls?

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**CL:** Leia is 5 and Daniela is 2 ½. If I don't bring them home pizza once a week, I will not be allowed home. That's how much my family loves our pizza.

**AFM:** Name some items that we would usually find in your fridge.

**CL:** You'll find plenty of beer, really good parmesan, lots of Capris Sun and lately, a lot of salad fixings.

**AFM:** What is your best advice for a young chef who wants a career like yours?

**CL:** My advice would be to work at a place where you get up every morning and you are excited to go to work. There's never been a day where I woke up and wasn't excited about what the day had ahead. Life is too short to live without loving what you do.

**AFM:** There are lots of good pizzerias around. Here is your opportunity to brag about the quality and ingredients that make Grimaldi's pizza so great

**CL:** Grimaldi's has a history like no other, and I truly believe we are still one of the best pizzerias in the US. Our hand-built brick oven is unique to our industry and cooking with coal is truly what differentiates us. That high heat and smoky flavor makes our pizza simply incredible.

Our specially milled flour and specialized water creates some of the thinnest most flavorful crust you've ever tasted. Combine that with hand-cut mozzarella, fresh topping options and a rich sauce and you've got one incredible pie.



**AFM:** To be able to work with those hot coal brick ovens and turn our perfect pizzas is an art. Tell us about that, and tell us about your team.

**CL:** I think cooking in that oven is the single most difficult cooking task I've seen in any kitchen. Imagine wrangling a heavy 8-ft. pizza peel into a 2,000-degree oven, as it catches on fire, simply to twist a pizza. Now do that a couple of hundred times a day. Our training to be a certified stick guy is upwards of six months and those stick guys are the backbone of our company. They work incredibly hard and are skilled artists, when it comes to that oven.

**AFM:** What are two items on the menu that we must order?

**CL:** Every morning before opening our doors, we take whole red peppers and roast them in our brick oven. The team then individually peels the blackened peppers and hand slices them for the pizzas. They are incredible. We also just added a spicy chicken sausage to the menu. It is spicy, flavorful and if we didn't tell you it was chicken, you'd have no idea.

**AFM:** What do you love most about your job?

**CL:** I love how much other people love our product. There's nothing that gives me more pleasure than to look around our restaurants and see people with smiles on their faces enjoying the food.



**AFM:** What's the best advice you ever received?

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**CL:** You better marry that girl. You finally found someone who will put up with you, don't let her go.