

Written by Written by Kathy Shayna Shocket

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Kathy Shayna Shocket has an insider's view on the stories that make headlines.



Why the pizza czars of Chicago style Lou Malnati's are celebrating in Phoenix.

Oh the cheesy delight of a very historical Mother's Day celebration at Lou Malnati's in Phoenix. Among the moms enjoying the famous pizzeria known for its Chicago signature deep dish - it was one mother's first visit. Not just any mom, you see, but the family's matriarch, **Jean Malnati**



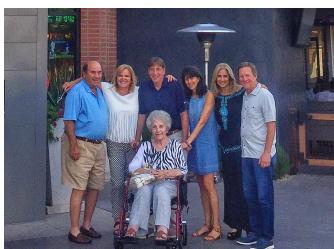
**Miller**. She opened the first restaurant with her husband **Lou Malnati** in a Chicago suburb.

So **Jean's** visit to the Phoenix store- the first location the company opened outside the Chicagoland area in its 45-year history - was an important one for the Malnati family. Especially since an illness kept her from traveling to be a part of the prior fanfare at the Phoenix location. It's the first opening of a Lou Malnati's she's ever missed.

Excitement was building as her son **Marc Malanti** (now at the helm of the company) and the Malnati family were waiting for **Jean** to come through the doors. "I can't wait for her to see it, especially how unique our indoor-outdoor experience is here," he says of the design of the large patio outdoor space which differs from the Chicago stores because of the Phoenix weather. The growth of the company - now forty-seven locations strong in the Chicago area- wasn't always easy, especially after **Lou** died in 1978.



"She was our biggest cheerleader," says **Marc**, of his mother pictured with his brother **Rick Malnati** above left and above right with their parents. "After my dad died she pushed my brother and me to do outdoor food festivals and events that helped us to regain our footing and grow," he says referring to the 1980's Taste of Chicago festival where they cooked up their pizza fresh on site! "That really helped give us exposure."



What also made **Jean's** Mother's Day visit so historical, was the timing. (**Jean** is pictured above with **Marc** and his wife **Jeanne Malnati**, **Rick** and wife **Tina** and friends **Scott Weiner** and wife **Carolyn Weiner**.) It's been one year since the pizzeria opened in Phoenix. Yes, it's been a year since those long lines of enthusiastic fans around the block of fans at the grand opening. "At that table are our longtime employees who relocated to live in Phoenix," notes Marc as he glances over at the six people meeting in the back of the restaurant. **Marc** takes pride in the overwhelming success of the Phoenix location. It's exceeded their expectations!



**Kathy Shayna Shocket** is a freelance Writer and TV- Field Producer.. The former **TV-Reporter** has written for publications such as **TIME Magazine**, **Money Magazine**, **PEOPLE Magazine**, **The Hollywood Reporter** and **The NEW YORK TIMES**. You can reach her at [redcarpetgirl@aol.com](mailto:redcarpetgirl@aol.com)