

The Secret to Dario's Meatballs: His Mom

EIGHT THOUSAND MEATBALLS, 200 gallons of tomato sauce and about 2,000 sandwich rolls.

That's how much freshly made food Dario Designs (Booth 2381) expects to give away at this year's NAA Market Square, where sandwiches will be served from 11:30 am to 2:30 pm each day.

Serving meatballs is a way to build goodwill, generate publicity and say thank you to the newspaper industry, said Dario DiMare, president of Dario Designs. The meatballs also bring in new business to Dario Designs, which designs newspaper facilities. DiMare estimates he got 30 to 40 business leads at last year's NEXPO in Chicago.

DiMare is making this 23rd appearance at NEXPO, his meatballs are making their fourth, and the woman who inspired both the man and the meatballs—his mother, Sonia—is making her first, along with DiMare's wife, Linda, daughter, Christina, and sister, April.

The family's meatball recipe debuted in 1996, when DiMare learned the International Newspaper Group was bringing its annual conference to Boston, about 20 miles from his home in Framingham, where, at the time, he ran Dario Designs out of his basement.



Dario DiMare



DiMare's mother, Sonia [shown] will be making her first appearance at NEXPO.

Growing up, he said, "when someone came to town, we would make them dinner." DiMare wanted to do the same for ING participants, and it didn't hurt that the meatballs might also attract some attention to Dario Designs, which was founded in 1994.

DiMare asked his mother, sister, grandmother, and godmother to each make two dozen meatballs using their own recipes, and invited his friends over for a blind taste test. After the vote, DiMare came up with a hybrid recipe, which includes the basic ingredients of his mother's meatballs, the amount of parmesan cheese preferred by his god-mother, and his sister's secret for breadcrumbs, which give the meatballs their texture.



Michael Clift, information services director for the San Angelo (Texas) Standard-Times, takes time out from the show floor to sample some spicy meatballs.

MEATBALL RECIPE

Fry three cloves of freshly minced garlic and one medium onion in olive oil. After they are browned, add to:

- 1 pound ground round or ground chuck
- 1/2 pound ground pork
- 1 tablespoon minced parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 cup whole milk
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup grated parmesan
- 1 cup breadcrumbs

Mix, then roll into 1 1/2-inch balls. Put in olive oil on a pan and bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.

SAUCE RECIPE

- 5 cloves garlic, diced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1/2 pound ground beef
- 1/2 pound ground pork
- 1 (6 ounce) can tomato paste
- 1 can (6 ounce) of water
- 2 (28 ounce) cans tomato puree [or] 1 can of puree and 1 can crushed tomatoes
- 6 ounces good red wine (not cooking wine)
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon oregano
- 1 tablespoon basil

Cover bottom of pot with olive oil. Brown garlic and onion on low heat. Add meat and brown. Add tomato paste, water, and wine. Add remaining ingredients and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer; add meatballs and let simmer for at least 2 1/2 hours (can simmer up to 24 hours)

DiMare asked three employees to help him roll about 2,000 meatballs and make 25 gallons of sauce for the ING conference. His home, he adds, "smelled just like it would smell if you went to heaven."

However, DiMare didn't bring his meatballs to NEXPO until 2003, when he could afford to serve the large number of attendees. He said he no longer makes the meatballs by hand, but instead sends the recipe to a NEXPO caterer and supervises the kitchen as the chefs make the first batch. The kitchen makes about 400 servings of the recipe daily.

DiMare typically does the first taste test around 4am Saturday because he insists that the tomato sauce simmer overnight before being served. If the first test goes well, that's the last time he'll visit the kitchen, he said. If not, he keeps coming back until he's satisfied.

"I look at the ingredients, watch them cook it, taste it with the sauce, taste it without sauce," said DiMare, whose family hails from Trieste, in northern Italy, and Naples. His father and grandfathers were in the restaurant business in the United States and in Italy. "I tell them what to add, what to subtract."

DiMare said all the work is worth it, as NEXPO gives him a chance to catch up with old friends and share his family's food. And he encourages attendees to visit his booth often.

"We're the way my mom would be," said DiMare, who jokes that his blood type is marinara. "We're mad if you only have three sandwiches. That's our culture."