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CELEBRATING THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF DION'S PIZZA

**HON. TOM UDALL
OF NEW MEXICO**

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2003

- Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of the most successful small business enterprises in the state of New Mexico. February marks a quarter century of quality pizza, salads and sub sandwiches from one of New Mexico's beloved dining establishments, Dion's Pizza. This achievement marks another important chapter in a story of two childhood friends, since the ninth grade, who have formed a lasting friendship and partnership.
- The owners of Dion's, Jon Patten and Bill Scott, came to Albuquerque from Michigan in 1978 with dreams of opening a restaurant. After purchasing New York Pizza, a small local restaurant in financial trouble located in the Northeast Heights, Jon and Bill proceeded with plans of turning the pizzeria into a Greek restaurant to be called Dionysus. However, the struggling entrepreneurs found that the cost of ordering a sign with all those letters was too costly, but the name "Dion's" fit the bill just fine. While waiting for equipment necessary for the preparation of Greek food, the previous owner taught them how to make pizza so they could continue to operate in the interim. After a few weeks, Jon and Bill started serving Greek food along with the pizza. Surprisingly, however, customers continued to order pizza, encouraging Jon and Bill to develop and refine a quality pizza recipe, eventually resulting in today's secret recipe that has made Dion's one of New Mexico's best-loved eating establishments.
- The success of Dion's is easily documented. It grew from one employee in 1978, to 12 employees in 1979, to over 600 employees today. There are currently 10 Dion's in New Mexico. The company has plans to open a location in Las Cruces later this year and Santa Fe in 2005. The owners tease that their goal is world pizza domination by the year 3000. Clearly, they are on their way.
- Dion's attributes its success to a set of principles that has helped the chain expand and at the same time maintain a loyal base of satisfied customers. Among those principles are always using the freshest ingredients; never changing ingredients simply to get the

cheapest price; only serving food that is presentable and quality; hiring the best people; and giving the customer exceptional quality, service and cleanliness.

- The company's set of beliefs appears to be working. Dion's has received several awards over the years. The first recognition came in November, 1979, only 19 months after opening the first location. The Albuquerque Tribune named Dion's "the second best pizza in town." According to the owners, that was the last second place finish. Since then, Dion's has accumulated a number of first place awards. I know that Jon and Bill are the most proud of the praise they receive from regular citizens.
- One of the most admirable aspects of Dion's business philosophy is its dedication to being a family-oriented establishment. None of the locations serve alcohol, and smoking is not allowed. Viewing stands have been constructed in each restaurant to enable children to watch pizzas being made. Additionally, Dion's offers tours to children and other youth groups; approximately 12,000 children tour Dion's restaurants each year. The company is also involved in a host of charitable events in which its contributions make a powerful impact on the surrounding community.
- I had the opportunity to tour a Dion's in 2000. I was impressed with the quality of employees, many of them high school students starting their first careers, and the ambience that encompasses each Dion's. This company has many employees that have stayed on for years, if not decades, out of loyalty. In an industry that has a high turnover rate, Dion's is obviously doing something right. The company has always paid above minimum wage, and raises are frequent for doing a job well done.
- As Dion's continues to grow and expand, there will undoubtedly be changes. Over the years, the employee uniforms have changed, as has the list of items on the menu. Jon and Bill are not afraid to be innovative and are always searching for improvements. Dion's has had a number of offers to be bought and be expanded nationally. Today there could be a Dion's on nearly every street corner in America, but instead, Jon and Bill have stayed to protect a creation they both care deeply about.
- Mr. Speaker, we spent much time in the 107th Congress focusing on a variety of corporate scandals that seriously shook the faith of Americans everywhere. At that time, I tried to stress that there are honest companies out there, and we must not let those isolated cases of gross misconduct spoil our view of average businesses. I believe that Dion's Pizza is an exceptional example of a business that has succeeded because of the devotion of its owners and employees.
- As this special restaurant celebrates its 25th anniversary, it remains one of a kind. It is unique amongst its peers throughout the country for its philosophy and principles, but, most of all, because it is the product of so many remarkable people and ideas. It is truly part of the communities it serves, and New Mexicans are proud to call Dion's their own. I ask my colleagues join me in congratulating Dion's for its success.