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PAUL CARTER/The Register-Guard

At Track Town Pizza's West 11th restaurant, owner Mary Carrero poses with her sons Tom Slagle (left) and Ken Slagle. The new outlet expands the customer base beyond the UO.

## FAST TRACK

**A campus pizzeria finds success by broadening its customer base**

By MELISSA LEVY  
The Register-Guard

Unlike most Oregonians, restaurant owners near the University of Oregon don't look forward to summer.

They're waiting for the sunny season to end so students return flush with cash for pizzas, subs and hamburgers.

Mary Carrero is the exception. Thanks to a smart business plan, the owner of Eugene's Track Town Pizza restaurants — one across the street from the UO campus — is looking forward to a busier summer than usual.

Carrero just opened a 1,000-square-foot dining room at her store on West 11th Avenue, and expanded delivery service to Coburg Road and Springfield's Gateway area.

The former accountant is also looking at sites for new outlets in Santa Clara and Springfield. Carrero hopes to begin Track Town's next round of expansion soon after her original investment in the business is paid off in February 1996.

Carrero knows the summer doldrums. When she bought the campus-area Track Town restaurant on Franklin Boulevard in 1991, sales fell 50

percent during the summer.

It's no wonder: 80 percent of the pizzeria's customers were college students. Carrero knew she needed to broaden her customer base to survive.

Because of aggressive advertising, Carrero expects sales at the campus eatery to drop less than 20 percent this summer. And she says 80 percent of Track Town's customers are now from outside the UO community.

Carrero says Track Town's sales have doubled in the past three years, but she wouldn't reveal revenue figures.

"We're still trying to build our image," Carrero says. "Our success and being independent isn't an easy thing."

Track Town's strategy of broadening its customer base isn't unusual in the highly competitive pizza industry. Many large chains such as Little Caesars and Pizza Hut have enhanced product and service offerings, according to

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trade magazine Restaurant Business.

However, some smaller, local pizzerias worry about growing too big too quickly.

Sy Zeer says he has competed with Track Town and a couple of other pizzerias since he and his wife, Gail, opened Sy's New York Pizza near campus in 1978.

Although he has considered expanding to an outlet away from the UO, he decided to focus on his Alder Street location.

"I'm tempted at times," Zeer says of opening another location. "But you don't want to spread yourself too thin. You have to concentrate on the first store because you want to dig down and make that your quality base."

Carrero began to distance Track Town from its "campus hangout" image in 1992 by investing heavily in advertising and introducing more gourmet toppings. The next year, she opened the West 11th store to expand Track Town's reach into

To further compensate for the summer letdown, Track Town sells mini pizzas at a variety of community events. The eatery is in its fourth season as a vendor at Eugene Emeralds baseball games. Track Town sold about 10,000 pizzas at Civic Stadium last year, Carrero says.

The ingredients Track Town uses in an average month are staggering — 2 tons of barbecue chicken and pepperoni, and 5 tons of cheese.

Last March, Carrero needed to begin leasing a 1,000-square-foot commissary in west Eugene and hire six workers to prepare the stores' 31 pizza toppings.

The new West 11th dining area will serve the standard pizza menu along with soup and salad bar and 12 varieties of beer. It also features the same all-you-can-eat lunch special as the Franklin store.

In a few weeks, the West 11th location will begin offering drive-up espresso service from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. Carrero says her 90 employees also persuaded her to experiment with selling a mini breakfast pizza

with eggs, cheese, Canadian bacon or sausage.

"This wasn't in our plan," she says. "It just came up, and it's a great opportunity."

Customers lingering at the West 11th dining room this week said Track Town is often their first choice for pizza.

"When I've got the money for good pizza, I'll call Track Town," said former UO student Stuart Conrad.

"I crave Track Town pizza occasionally," agreed Jeff Smerek, looking up from the "Hammer" pizza he was sharing with Conrad. "I lived in New York for a while, and you get tired of flat pizza. Track Town is good Oregon pizza."

### Track Town Pizza

■ **Locations:** 1809 Franklin Blvd., 2511 W. 11th Ave.

■ **Toppings:** 31, including BBQ chicken, Oregon shrimp and pineapple.

■ **Employees:** 90 during the school year, 60 during the summer.

■ **Expansion:** Opened 1,000-square-foot dining area and is starting a drive-up espresso service at West 11th; added delivery to Gateway and Coburg Road; next goal is to open stores in Santa Clara and Springfield.

■ **Competition:** In the past 10 years, more than 30 new pizza outlets have opened in Lane County, including industry giant Pizza Hut.