

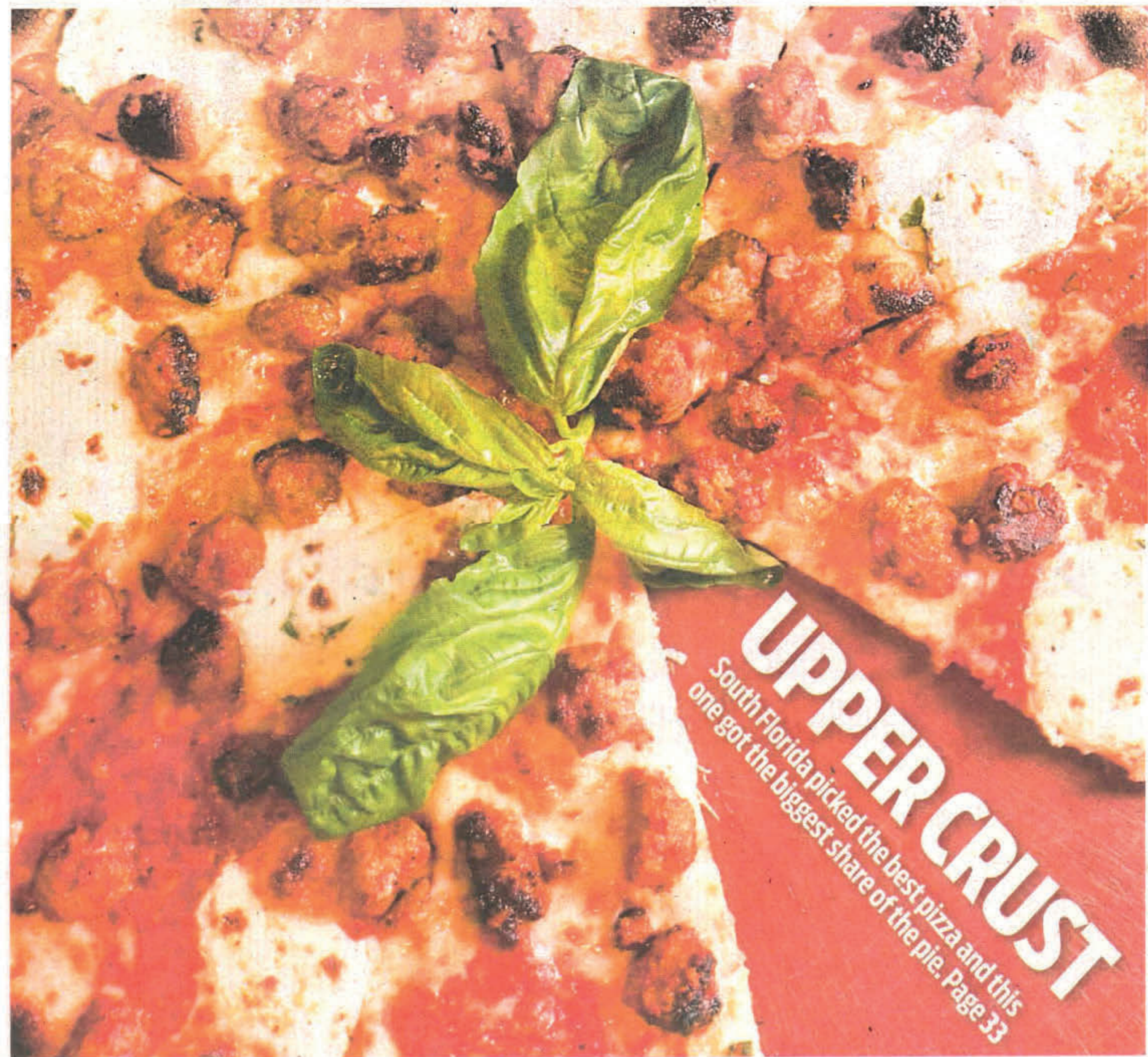
showtime BEST PIZZA

The votes are in for the South Florida pizzeria that tops the rest
IN SHOWTIME

South Florida
Sun-Sentinel

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UPPER CRUST

South Florida picked the best pizza and this one got the biggest share of the pie. Page 33

ANTHONY'S IS THE BIG CHEESE

Coal Fired chain gets nod from South Floridians

By John Tanasychuk
SUN SENTINEL

Even Anthony Bruno has a hard time believing it. Open a restaurant that serves three basic menu items: pizza, chicken wings and salad. Become so successful that in eight years, you own 23 locations in Florida, Las Vegas, Wilmington, Del., and Hershamp, Penn.

That's the story of Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza, just named the region's best pizza in the Sun Sentinel's online Best of South Florida series.

"This is wonderful," said a delighted Bruno, who owns the Pompano Beach-based chain with a group of six partners, including football Hall of Famer Dan Marino. "Are you kidding me?"

If you've ever been to Anthony's, you know this is no ordinary pizza. It starts with what has become the centerpiece of each restaurant — a coal-burning oven that reaches a temperature of 800 degrees. That oven not only gives each pie a distinctive flavor, but also gives the crust a crispiness.

It doesn't hurt that Anthony's starts with high-quality mozzarella, plum tomatoes, basil and olive oil.

While guests can build their own pies around a list of 10 toppings, there are nine specialty creations priced at \$15.95 for a small (6 pieces) or \$18.95 for large (8 pieces).

Meatball and ricotta, for instance, is a creamy combination of mini meatballs and melted cheese. Order an arugula pie for takeout and the peppery greens are



Anthony Bruno, left, and chef Michelangelo Mozzicato show off their baby meatball and ricotta cheese pie.

GINNY DIXON/SUN SENTINEL

packaged separately to top your pie at home.

Everything on the menu sells well, but the Paul & Young Ron — meatballs, sausage, peppers and ricotta cheese, named for WBBG's morning drive radio hosts Paul Castronovo and Ron Brewer — is a perpetual favorite. Eggplant Marino is also popular. I like a simple onion and mushroom combo.

If Anthony's has a quality controller, it's Vice President Michelangelo Mozzicato. He's known as Anthony's official pizzaiolo, or top pizza maker. Mozzicato was working as a waiter at Bruno's other restaurant — Anthony's Runway 84 on State Road 84 in Fort Lauderdale — where he would

experiment with pizza-making for staff meals.

"We have basically the same menu from the day we opened," said Mozzicato, who works with Bruno to come up with new combinations.

Right now, they're serving a superb cauliflower pizza in the Fort Lauderdale location, which Mozzicato oversees. Cauliflower is oven roasted with garlic and oil and then used as a pizza topping with seasoned bread crumbs, mozzarella and romano cheese.

No story about Anthony's would be complete without mentioning that some people don't like what they serve. The crust, they say, is burnt.

"You can't please all the

people all the time," Bruno said. "But I was in my Delray Beach store a few weeks ago and was amazed at how good the pies were looking. I always like to touch the crust when it comes out to make sure it's nice and crispy. One pie came back 30 seconds later."

"The lady says it's burnt!" the waiter said.

"Tell the lady to eat!" Bruno said. "If she doesn't like it, she doesn't have to pay for it and she doesn't have to come back. She ate it and she loved it."

Another satisfied customer:

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Runners-up

Second place in the Sun Sentinel online best pizza contest went to another South Florida-based chain — Pizza Fusion.

Pizza Fusion got its start with one store on Federal Highway and Sunrise Boulevard in 2006 and is now a 20-franchise operation. It's the first all-natural, eco-friendly pizza franchise. Pizzas are delivered in hybrid vehicles, Smart cars, electric scooters and bicycles. There are South Florida locations in Fort Lauderdale, Weston, Palm Beach Gardens and North Miami Beach. Log onto pizzafusion.com for locations.

Three restaurants tied for third place:

Conca D'Oro Restaurant & Pizza, 1833 Tyler St., Hollywood, 954-927-6704. Dominic and Melina DeLuca have been serving pizza and Italian specialties for 34 years.

Sicilian Oven, 2486 N. Federal Highway, Lighthouse Point, 954-785-4155 and 10140 W Sample Road, Coral Springs, 954-340-3001. Along with very good pizza and chicken wings, try the Sicilian lasagna made without pasta but with layers of eggplant and veggies.

Nick's Italian Restaurant, 3496 N. Ocean Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, 954-563-6441. This classic red sauce Italian restaurant can't be missed with its bright red, green and white awning. Upstairs, there's dancing on weekends.

—John Tanasychuk

If you go

Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza

South Florida locations in Fort Lauderdale, Coral Springs, Pembroke Pines, Plantation, Pompano Beach, Weston, Boca Raton, Delray Beach, Palm Beach Gardens, Wellington, Aventura, Doral, Pinecrest, West Kendall and Miami Lakes.

Most locations are open 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. daily. Some are open later. Anthonyiscoalfiredpizza.com