

## A SLICE OF THE BIG TIME

**F**ORGET ABOUT HAVING A SQUARE meal—round is really where it's at. We're talking pizza here, and for more than a quarter century, Shakespeare's Pizza has been baking up the prince of pies for town and gown alike.

Locals have known for years that the pizza joint just north of the J-School on Ninth Street is a slice above the rest. But last year a national trade publication, *Pizza Today*, named Shakespeare's to the A-list—and A doesn't stand for anchovy. The magazine listed "Shake's" on its "Hot 100," an annual roster of the best independent pizza restaurants.

And, with \$2.5 million in 1999 sales, Shakespeare's was in the top five nationally for operations with only one store. That might sound like a lot of dough, but it's practically mom-and-pop compared with the big cheese of the pizza industry. Pizza Hut, with 10,200 outlets, served up \$5 billion worth of pies.

Manager and part owner Kurt

Mirtsching, BS BA '81, doesn't have any argument with the national ranking, but he's not sure where the magazine came up with its sales figures. "That sounds pretty generous," he says. Generous, just like the bubbling layer of mozzarella that keeps customers coming back for more.

Now, he's not exactly saying those numbers are half-baked, because no matter how you slice it, Shake's serves up a mountain of pies.

There's no big secret to Shakespeare's success, Mirtsching says. "Good pizza, quality ingredients. The rest of it is just standard restaurant stuff: Make sure the pepperoni is right-side up, the beer's cold and the restrooms are clean."

Just like plain vanilla is the flavor of choice for ice cream aficionados, Mirtsching says that pepperoni is still the No. 1 topping for Shakespeare's pizza purists. In fact, the restaurant goes through a quarter ton every week.

He should know his pepperoni by now. Mirtsching started delivering pizzas for Shake's in 1978, when he was still an MU student. He worked his way up to dishwasher, then cook, then started managing after he graduated.

He's also watched this one-time storefront take-out spot, just like a vat of rising dough, expand into an empire of pies that covers nearly half a block. Shake's even offers a line of frozen pizzas at area supermarkets.

*Pizza Today magazine recognized something MU students have known for more than 25 years: Shakespeare's makes darn good pizza.*

PHOTO BY ROB HILL



First opened in 1973, Shakespeare's has crept into a former eatery next door that earlier generations of students will remember as Max's Ham and Egger. Then it took over the laundromat out back, and finally claimed a parking lot where the Dine-O-Mite Drive In once stood.

For an industry that thrives on its Iberian roots—with names like Guisepp'e's or Luigi's or Mama Rosa's—Shakespeare's moniker stands apart as well. No one's sure exactly how it got that name, but it's developed an ironic twist today. "It doesn't have a dusty, stodgy English feel to it," Mirtsching says. "We joke that now it's the place you go if you're going to skip your Shakespeare class."

## 'NAM DE PLUME

**L**IKE MANY YOUNG MEN graduating from college in the mid-1960s, Larry Rottmann had more on his mind than simply finding a

