

The Survivalist: The 25th anniversary of the Frenchtown Cafe

Jeff Scott

Simply put, Rosella Caloiero is a survivor. Soon after opening her iconic Frenchtown Cafe in 1996, she parted ways with her husband and business partner. She was told that she'd never make it alone.

"All that did," she said, "was fuel me to work even harder." Rosella proceeded to nurture and grow her breakfast and lunch "must-eat" destination for locals and tourists alike — one that often had lines stretching out the door on weekends.

All that changed in August of 2018, when a runaway truck crashed into the Italian restaurant next door to the cafe, igniting a fireball that rendered both her business and the two apartments above it uninhabitable. Rosella could have called it quits. Instead, she assessed the damage and oversaw a renovation that took 15 long months, but brought the cafe back to life with both modern amenities and an old

time feel. With the grand reopening in November of 2019, both new and neighborhood friends streamed in to once again devour her classic breakfast and lunch fare. Finally, everything was back to normal.

Then, in March of 2020, it all came crashing down, as she was forced to join the ranks of businesses everywhere when the COVID-19 pandemic shut her down, once again.

To borrow a now famous phrase from the world of politics, "still she persists."

And on Monday (Feb. 15) this relentless restaurateur will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Frenchtown Cafe — as the culmination of one woman's never-say-die attitude.

Rosella's parents, Francesco and Carmela, spent most of their lives in the restaurant business — primarily in South Jersey.

Rosella had no choice but to follow suit. And while she got her workaholic drive from her mother, it was her father who instilled in her



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Rosella Caloiero's Frenchtown Cafe has survived despite major setbacks.

the will to keep going. "Dad never gave up — he'd never quit no matter what obstacle he faced. He'd just figure out another

way." And so did Rosella after the fire, with her first priority finding work for her suddenly displaced employees. She sent some to the Sky Cafe, her other restaurant located in Pittstown, and landed jobs for others after reaching out to friends who owned dining establishments in the area.

In the midst of all this, Rosella endured still another personal tragedy when her best friend, Bob Trimmey, passed away. "He meant the world to me," she said. "It was hard."

And just before Christmas of 2019, she lost her father and culinary mentor. "I kept thinking that it can't possibly get any worse. It just seemed like it was one thing after another."

After the pandemic hit, Rosella shifted gears to become a take-out restaurant, but even that was met with challenges.

"I put out a few tables and chairs for people to sit on until their order was ready to go," she said. "But

some folks called the cops and just after Memorial Day weekend they shut me down. It wasn't like they were eating there, they were just resting and waiting."

Finally in September of last year, indoor seating was permitted at 25% capacity, which meant about 15 customers at a time. "But for the longest time, people just did not want to eat inside," she recalled. "It took a while."

New Jersey now permits 35% seating indoors. But with the virus variants that are being discovered throughout the world, who knows how long that will last.

The only certainty is that this month — after being told that she'd never make it alone — and after battling through all the countless setbacks — Rosella Caloiero will open the doors to the Frenchtown Cafe for the 25th year.

"It's been tough," she said, "especially these last few years. But whenever I get depressed I think of my dad. I hear him saying 'never give up. Never! And I don't.'"

Palisades calls to end charter school payments for costs they did not incur

Cliff Lebowitz

On the same day that Gov. Tom Wolf proposed, in the education part of his Feb. 3 budget agenda for fiscal 2021-2022, "comprehensive charter school law reform to align taxpayer spending to actual charter school costs," the Palisades School District renewed its own annual call to the state General Assembly "to ensure that school

districts and their taxpayers are no longer overpaying these schools, or reimbursing for costs the charter schools do not incur."

The action was taken at the district's public school board meeting as unanimous approval of a resolution that Superintendent Bridget O'Connell noted was "the same as last year, put up for a revote for the new legislative session."

The resolution notes the call

for reform is for a law that was enacted in 1997, and unchanged since then. Board members have complained fervently about the law at board meetings, and to their state representatives, at least since 2012. It is noted as adversely affecting all public school districts in the state.

Earlier in the meeting, board President Bob Musantry, in his report as liaison to the Pennsyl-

vania School Boards Association (PSBA), said his preliminary review of the governor's proposal showed it included a "statewide flat rate for cyber charter schools." Later in the meeting, district Business Manager Drew Bishop said that if the flat rate was in effect "for this year, it would have saved the district \$900,000, and for next year, \$1.1 million."

The complete text of the reso-

lution is available on the district website, through the agenda for the Feb. 4 meeting. Gov.Wolf's presentation is available via pa.gov.

As the district's budget process has proceeded for the 2021-2022 school year, present and former officials alike have expressed frustration that local taxpayers appear to be unaware of "what the present law is costing them."

Routine traffic stop in Bedminster leads to major drug bust

A routine traffic stop by an observant Bedminster Township patrol officer led to a drug investigation that took nearly \$4 million worth of cocaine, heroin and fentanyl off the streets.

Bedminster Township Officer James Zukow pulled over a Jeep for swerving four times over the fog line Friday, Jan. 29, and the driver consented to a search, which led to the seizure of one kilogram of heroin/fentanyl and nine kilograms of cocaine with a street value of \$1.2 million.

That bust led to a search of a tractor-trailer Wednesday, Feb. 3, at a truck stop in Lehigh County where detectives found nine more kilograms of heroin/fentanyl valued at \$2.7 million.

In addition, the two searches led to the recovery of more than \$43,000 in cash, a handgun, six cellphones, additional drugs, including almost \$29,000 in Percocet pills, and four Jesu Malverde candles, known as the Patron

Saint of narco-traffickers. District Attorney Matt Weintraub said at a news conference on Thursday, Feb. 4.

Calling it "great instinctual police work, some hard work and collaboration among law enforcement," Weintraub said the investigation revealed Christian Ochoa, 28, of Laredo, Texas, drove the drugs across the country, which were likely headed to "passing through" Bucks County when he was stopped, Weintraub said. "We saved somebody else a lot of heartache and pain," he said.

Edith Tomasa Rodriguez Cardenas, 27, of Huntington Park, Calif., was a passenger in his car during the traffic stop. Weintraub said the arrests were likely part of a much larger narco-trafficking organization and he will utilize partnerships with federal agencies to track the source of the drugs.

Ochoa and Rodriguez Cardenas were charged in the initial traffic

stop with possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, conspiracy to commit possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, possession of a small amount of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia. Ochoa was also charged with a traffic lane violation. Both were arraigned by District Judge Michael W. Petrucchi and were sent to Bucks County Correctional Facility under \$1 million bail each.

Charges were pending related to the Lehigh County search. In that search, a tractor-trailer that Ochoa owned and had the logo "Ochoa Transport Services" was parked in Upper Macungie Township, K9 Baron from the Central Bucks Regional Police Department was called in to assist in the search and got a hit on the cab of the truck. The trailer was found to contain a legitimate load of agricultural products.

"I am really pleased and proud to say thank you to our police of-

ficers and all law enforcement that collaborated on this drug bust," Weintraub said. "Because of it, so

many of our loved ones will not suffer a death at the hands of these narco-traffickers."

Bucks County Parent's Guide to Schools coming

In keeping with its year-round commitment to providing extensive educational coverage and resources to the community, the Bucks County Herald will publish the second edition of The Bucks Parent's Guide to Schools on Feb. 18.

"We have received such positive feedback since the publication of the first issue," said Joe Wingert, publisher of the Bucks County Herald. "This publication will continue to be an insightful resource for local parents who are navigating the educational journeys of their children."

With specialized content prepared by educational experts from around the region, parents of preschool to high school children will find up-to-date guidance on topics such as scholarships for local private schools, working with educational consultants, children's book reviews, a Quaker-based education, and creative fun for kids in these challenging



The cover of the 2020 edition of the Bucks County Parent's Guide to Schools.

times. The Bucks Parent's Guide to Schools will be a special section of the printed and online version of the Herald, which is read by over 250,000 readers each week. To advertise, contact Allan Ash, director of sales, at 215-794-1096 x121 or aash@buckscountyherald.com.

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