

They're all fired up over pizza

By **STEPHANIE M. MANGINO**
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STEPHENS CITY — Frank and Dana Conlon's family began burning up the roads with a mobile pizza oven at the end of the summer.

Traveling throughout the region with an Italian-style wood-fired oven constructed on the back of a dump truck, the Stephens City group takes its Fired Up Pizza to a variety of regional festivals.

The company offers catering services using its mobile oven, bringing the pizza to the site.

Made from simple, fresh ingredients, the pizzas bake quickly in the 900-degree oven, Frank said. "They cook in less than two minutes."

The unusual business flows seamlessly from the life the Conlons have built with their six children, some of whom are grown. The youngest are 14 and 11.

They all participate in the business and "It makes memories for the family," Frank said. That includes every child, down to the youngest ones. "When they're not riding their horses, they're helping their mom make dough balls."

Frank and Dana, both 48, love to entertain. As the mother of six, she long ago developed cooking skills.

Pizza, always a favorite of their large clan, became a homemade speciality, since pies from their kitchen cost less than those from a freezer case or a pizzeria, said Dana, an ardent baker who grinds her own wheat for bread, using an electric grinder.

A love of food and family was already a big part of their lives, so it wasn't a huge surprise when one of their sons returned from Italy and said his mother needed an oven like those used in pizza's original home.

And Frank was just the man to construct one, since he has been a local builder for 25 years.

About a year ago, the family ended up with a pizza oven at their small farm near Stephens City. Then, with the construction industry's slowdown, Frank said, "I just came with an idea to build one on the back of a truck."

The mobile pizza operation just seemed like the right idea, he said, because people who came to their home kept asking, "When are you making pizza?"



JEFF TAYLOR/The Winchester Star

Josh Conlon of Stephens City tosses pizza dough for his family's mobile Pompeii oven. The pizzas, made from simple, fresh ingredients, cook quickly in the 900-degree mobile oven. Menu items include Margherita, Classic White, Fired Up!, Sicilian, and Meat Lover's varieties.

The name of the business emerged through a chance comment to Dana, Frank said.

The two were discussing the name, and Frank said he was really "fired up" about the idea. As soon as he spoke the words, he knew the name of the company had been born.

Through Fired Up, the family has not only traveled with a pizza oven, but it has also built outdoor pizza ovens for other people, for about \$7,000 each.

A pizza is a less-expensive way to experience what the wood-fired oven can do, Dana, who developed the young company's recipes, uses Caputo flour from Italy, a high-gluten flour that, she said, in the super-high temperatures of the oven, produces a "light, extremely thin crust."

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Tips for home-made pies

While Dana Conlon won't part with her secret recipes for Fired Up pizza, she has some tips cooks can use for creating tip-top pies at home:

- When making the crust, keep it simple — using just yeast, water, and flour to avoid making a heavier dough.

- Lighten up on the sauce, and focus on other toppings, aside from cheese.

- Conlon is partial to thinly sliced vegetables such as arti-

choke hearts and Vidalia onions.

- Remember to slice vegetable toppings very thin, so you can enjoy their flavor in every bite.

- Meat is a tasty addition to a pizza, Conlon agrees, "but the more vegetables, the better."

- And don't forget to cook your pizza at a high temperature, if possible.

