A slice of Italy: Student-run Felice’s brings a taste of Rome close to home
By Roberta Anglin
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Loyola students will have another pizza option starting Feb. 25, when Felice's Roman Style Pizza opens near the university bookstore on North Sheridan Road.

The restaurant, named after Loyola's John Felice Rome Center, is the fourth business to open as part of the student-run enterprise Loyola Limited. Loyola Limited's other businesses include the Flats at Loyola Station (a guesthouse), Loyola Property Management (a real estate portfolio management firm) and Chainlinks (a bicycle rental program).

Freshman Briana Collins thinks Loyola enables students to make something of themselves with these student-run businesses.

"I think it's a good example for other students to see the opportunity that Loyola can provide for people. Students can make a difference even in Chicago, which is such a large city."

Felice's President, senior Sean Connolly, a political science major, said he feels like Loyola has a lot of restaurant chain options available, such as Subway and Chipotle, but Felice's will add a new and different option.

"The whole neighborhood really needs dining options right now," he said.

Many of Felice's staff members have studied abroad at Loyola's Rome Center-including Connolly, who was abroad in the fall of 2010-and were inspired to bring a taste of Italy back to Chicago. Connolly and Loyola senior Maria Signore was inspired to start Felice's after their time in Rome's many pizza restaurants. Connolly approached the university with the idea of opening a restaurant similar to the ones he and Signore frequented in Rome.

Signore, Felice's director of finance, studied in Rome during the spring 2010 semester. For the economics and finance double major, the restaurant is a reflection of Italy.

"Everything is fresh and seasonal and it changes all the time," Signore said. "It shows the way they do things [in Italy]."

Roman pizza is served al taglio, or by the cut, and it is priced according to the weight of the slice. Felice's will have the same system and include the same thin, crispy pizza on dough that is similar to flatbread. Some of the varieties of pizza Felice's will be offering include margharita, Hawaiian, four seasons and meat-lovers. Slices will cost $3-$8, depending upon the weight and toppings of your choice.

Felice's pizza offerings may vary from week to week, depending on what the customers are buying, Connolly said. All of those variations will be light, in hopes of avoiding heaviness and
greasiness found at other pizza restaurants. The new eatery will also have vegetarian options, and the staff hopes to introduce some vegan options as well.

Many of the items on the menu will be homemade, including the dough, sauce, soups, bread and croutons. They also will sell Coke products and the Italian green teas San Pellegrino and San Benedetto. However, they will not sell alcohol or, for the moment, dessert, which will remain a goal for the future.

Between 25 to 30 people will be able to eat in Felice's at one time, and while they won't offer a delivery service, they are open Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. until 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. until 3 a.m. and on Sunday from noon until 9 p.m. Even though the restaurant is student run, they will still be open during the summer. Felice's will accept Rambler Bucks, as well as credit cards and cash. They hope to have a punch card system as well, which would help students receive discounts on menu items after a certain number of visits.

As for the employees baking and serving up customers' slices, the 38 of 150 Loyola undergraduate students that applied were hired. An important hiring factor was students' availabilities in terms of scheduling for shifts.

"The big challenge is definitely doing it as full-time students," Signore said, "and that's where our team as a whole comes into play because we couldn't do it without each other."

The Felice's management team received a business loan from the university in order to jump-start the eatery, and now, the students have full control of its day-to-day operations. The loan was $500,000, and it will be paid back with interest in 20 years, according to Connolly.

There are three directors who work with Connolly on the ins and outs of the restaurant. The management staff also includes two operations associates and one finance associate. These students applied and were interviewed for the positions last March.

Because Felice's is student-run and its employees' time at Loyola will eventually end, the current seniors will have to pass down the torch when they graduate. "Succession planning is always tricky, but that's what makes it a lot of fun too," Connolly said.

The current Felice's management has written all of the manuals and have been training and preparing their underclassmen staff, Connolly added.

Felice's hopes to one day cater for Loyola University Retreat and Ecology Campus (LUREC), as well as using food items grown at the campus' farm, Connolly said.

"A small business that survives is one that has a really strong heart and soul to it," Signore said. "I hope that [Felice's] becomes a part of the heart and soul of Loyola."