



LANE DADDONA

Tony Della is a regular Saturday special at Uncle Giuseppe's Marketplace in Port Jefferson Station.

# SINGING IN THE AISLES

Sure, it's an unconventional gig, but crooner Tony Della has been serenading shoppers at Uncle Giuseppe's for years

BY CARL CORRY  
*Special to Newsday*

**I**t's a bustling Saturday afternoon at Uncle Giuseppe's Marketplace in Port Jefferson Station as customers prepare for yet another snowstorm. The assortment of freshly baked bread is sold out, and milk is going fast. Shoppers come for prepared foods sold by the pound, for fresh mozzarella, homemade pastas and imported cheeses.

And the music.

At first, the standards like "Fly Me to the Moon," and "It Had to Be You" coming from the 57,000-square-foot store's speaker system might sound like Muzak. But the singing is fuller, crisper, clearer, more inviting.

Meet Tony Della, a longtime singer who has performed at this

Uncle Giuseppe's on Saturdays since it opened in 2010.

Della, 66, of Riverhead, holding a wireless mic, deftly guides customers to the 13-table cafe seating area without missing a lyric. He favors songs made famous by crooners such as Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, but Billy Joel, Barry White and Eric Clapton are in the mix.

"I like to play music that people like to hear and like to sing along to," said Della, who uses CD tracks as background music to complement his vocals.

Sue Lingenfelter, 66, of Port Jefferson Station, was eating pizza in the cafe area, singing along to "Spanish Eyes." She is a regular at Uncle Giuseppe's, but it was the first time

See DELLA on G28



Della's wireless microphone allows him to roam the aisles as he entertains customers in Port Jefferson Station.

# Milk, bread and a song

## DELLA from G27

she had heard Della sing. "He's really great," she said. "He's keeping me from finishing the rest of my errands because I'm enjoying it."

Janice Cerullo, 61, of East Setauket has caught Della's act before and said it "gets you in this family mood . . . remembering Sunday dinners with my parents and grandparents. . . . It makes you want to shop more."

Those remarks are music to Uncle Giuseppe's executives, who first invited Della to perform at the grand opening of the company's Port Washington location in 2006.

"He brings an ambience to the store," said Marty Maguire, director of operations. "He brings something that nobody else has. The customers love him. And some people come here to shop just because he's here."

### Don't be shy, sing along

The most popular song Della performs is Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline." That's when, like guests at a wedding reception, the deli



Della in the cafe at Uncle Giuseppe's Marketplace.  
 ■ Video, more photos at [newsday.com/act2](http://newsday.com/act2)

counter guys get into the act. They stop their work and chime in on the chorus, shouting "ba-ba-ba" and "so good-so good-so good" after Della sings their cue. The crowd is welcome to join in, too.

Singing has been a constant for Della, whose father

played the guitar as his family sang at gatherings when Della was a child. Della started in garage bands while at Bayside High School in Queens and became the lead vocalist in a Top 40 band called Charlie Brown's People. He sang with a group

## Tony Della performs

**THURSDAYS** Caffe Amici, 353 Independence Plaza, Selden; 6-9 p.m.

**FRIDAYS** Venues vary

**SATURDAYS** Uncle Giuseppe's Marketplace, 1108 Route 112, Port Jefferson Station; 1-4 p.m.

**SUNDAYS** Uncle Giuseppe's, 95 Rte. 111, Smithtown; or 37 Hicksville Rd., Massapequa; 1-4 p.m.

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 — CARL CORRY

because of a problems with his lower spine.

Della continued to sing and organize the books for his family's sanitation business, choosing not to return to school. "School was something I wanted to do, but it wasn't a priority," Della said. Music was.

In 1970, he moved to the Philadelphia area to sing in a rock group, Supa Heat. A year later, he returned to his family's business in Queens and began working on a lounge act, singing standards, hoping to attract a record deal. He remembers often performing four nights a week in smoke-filled rooms after working his day job.

Around this time, he began dating Denise Bono, whom he had met years earlier, when Charlie Brown's People was the house band at the club Community Gardens in Queens Village. Denise's father was in the transmission business, and Della soon sensed there was a need for a transmission parts wholesaler. In 1972, he started Trans-A-Parts and married Denise four years later. They



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Della sings to Heidi Campani of Port Jefferson in the market's cafe.

first moved to Rosedale, Queens, before buying a home in Dix Hills in 1983, where they lived until selling the house last summer. Their daughter, Gina, 35, and son, Jason, 34, both live in Deer Park. Jason has a 1-year-old son, Anthony.

Della rejoined Charlie Brown's People in the early 1970s and performed with the group for about 20 years. He kept Trans-A-Parts until around 1998. Price undercutting from overseas competitors made it difficult to keep up cash flow, he said, so he closed the shop.

About two years later, he bought a few Lincoln Town cars and started a driving service in Queens and Manhattan. But singing was still his passion, so he took solo gigs at night, performing as far away as the Hamptons.

**'Total disaster,' new path**

Della was struggling to keep it all going when the World Trade Center towers were destroyed by terrorists on Sept. 11, 2001. For six or seven months, there was "total disaster" in Manhattan, he said. "I decided, that's it for me driving."

In 2003, he landed a job as an automotive aide at Western Suffolk BOCES and spent several years in that position. Currently, he is a teacher's aide for heating, ventilation and air conditioning, known widely as HVAC, at Wilson Technological Center in Dix Hills.

Singing is still a priority, but even Della admits that belting out old favorites at a supermarket is a bit unusual. "Originally, I had an agent friend of mine who said he had a friend who would like me to

do a grand opening for him," Della recalled. "Now, to understand that, I perform in a lot of restaurants, so when someone says a grand opening, I'm assuming it's another restaurant."

When Della showed up at the Port Washington address at around noon that Saturday in 2006, he was surprised by the venue. "I says, 'What kind of restaurant is that? Is it a lunch crowd?'"

The agent answered, "Oh, no, it's a supermarket."

Della said, "I kind of looked at him and said a few choice things like, 'You're going to have me in a car wash soon.'" But for troupers like Della, a show is a show, even when the background noise is chatting customers ordering food from the deli counter. His crooning impressed the owners, and he was asked to sing at the market's Smithtown location the following day. He did and was then invited to sing there every weekend. Della's circuit now includes restaurants and appearances at the Uncle Giuseppe's stores in Port Jefferson Station, Smithtown and Massapequa (see box).

"I went home and said to my wife, 'I don't know how long this is going to last. If it goes a month, we'll be lucky.' But lo and behold, this year, I'm celebrating nine years." Asked how much he gets paid, he said, "They treat me well."

Whether they're pushing a cart of groceries or munching a quick lunch, customers are welcome to request favorite tunes, Della said. "I tell people, 'Listen, if the band knows the song, I'll be more than happy to do it for you.'"

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