

# T's History



*Where we were, where we are.....And how we got here!*



The Original T's Variety 1982

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**"An Informal Essay"  
By Anthony Tomaselli**

## Introduction

"Why even write this?.....Do you really think people will read it?" .....That's what some have said.

You tell me!

**The** story of the conception and life of T's is, I think, an interesting, funny and if I do say so, an inspiring kind of tale. It's really what my wife and I refer to as the American Dream. Two people in love wanting to control their own destiny, by becoming their own bosses. How many times have you, or you and your spouse said, "Let's do something that we really enjoy"... or as I put it....., "You make the muffins and I'll do the bull work"....., "All we need is something small.....We don't need a lot." That's exactly how we started...no real business experience.....no real connections.....and believe me ....no money. What we did have were two basic intangibles that I thank God for....we had loyalty and a desire. Loyalty to each other, loyalty from our family, friends and staff and loyalty over the years from you guys, our customers. And a desire to make things work, really work, not just on the surface but from the inside out. Our relationship always came first, our customers were not taken for granted and money was only part of the equation. What we wanted was a lifestyle that would give us opportunity to enjoy the fruits of life.....fruits of life by our definition, meaning time.....time to work, time to spend with each other, time to reflect and time to smell the flowers and watch the sun set. The road from 1982 to 2008 was not an interstate. It was more like building from a series of pathways turned to roadways. As you know, especially living in this state, roadwork never ends and potholes are a fact of life.

## Part One

T's ..... "What's the " T " stand for?" we're often asked. My reply, "Tony and Tina Tomaselli....and, by the way, our children Tara and Anthony (Tony)." Twenty Six years ago in a tiny variety store on Budlong Road in Cranston, there were no children, no ovens, no beautifully decorated dining rooms, no fancy computer generated menus, no fantastic staff, and no parking either. What there was were two people with this dream to put their working destiny in their own hands.....young....brash.....and of course we knew everything.....well, I thought I did anyway.

Tina and I had just returned from a 10 week cross-country, finding ourselves, excursion.....penniless. It was May of 1982, Jimmy Carter was president and interest rates were at 18%. I had a degree in art and years of restaurant experience, Tina had a nursing degree and was working for an orthopedic surgeon at the time. Together, we had an idea. You know those thoughts, "Let's do something that we can call our own," "Let's be our own bosses." The dream.....the idea..... "Let's make a lifestyle that will bring us contentment."



Painting of "The Store" by John Campopiano  
I miss you buddy.....



**Beautiful, Bountiful.....Bottomless Cups**

**I found** myself before work one morning in May, after that trip across the continent, sitting in Pumpernick's Variety (soon to be T's Variety) at 289 Budlong Road, as I had done for years. I grew up in the house behind "The Store," you see. Penny candy in the 60's and my coffee and toast stop in the 70's. That morning the owner had enough. He was a bit older and ready to get out. And in a half-hearted fashion, I suggested that I buy "The Store". He lit up and said, "Put your money

where your mouth is." My first issue was to convince Tina of this idea and get her on-board. Secondly, we would need financing for the project Enter, my parents and the refinancing of their home. At the time I did not know the seriousness of that and as much as I was appreciative of that gesture, I later realized, I took it for granted.

One month later there we were. Tina and I scraping old paint, cleaning old and almost useless equipment, sweeping, painting, and eager to open. Finally in late June of 1982, T's Variety opened its doors to the public. Irv was our first customer ever and believe it or not, at the time of this writing, he still frequented "The Store." There were so many more regulars that became like family. To be honest, without family and friends like these, we might not have made it. Johnny (Rusty), Tom and Reese, were there every morning at 5:45am on their way to Davisville. Then the rest of the gang would show up, conversations ranged from Yankee-Red Sox debates to political and religious discussion. Did voices get a bit loud?..You Bet! Did people get mad? You Bet. Did they come back? You bet. We had fun!

## **Part 2**

### **Buy it.....**

Those first few months at the variety store brought about many changes that would set the tone for what direction "T's" would take. We opened selling coffee, doughnuts, soda, lottery, and many other convenience store staples. Very little food was served, a few grinders and mostly bought pastries. I became bored and a bit restless and my mind started grinding. "What else can we serve?" Spinach pies and Pizza strips came to mind.....but we had no ovens to cook them in.....so we walked to my mom and dad's house in the back yard and cooked 6 spinach pies and 8 pizza strips daily in their oven. Dad's pizza sauce recipe (still being used) and Joe D's spinach pie recipe (a great start) were the beginning of a business growth that neither Tina or I had ever imagined. Trial and error!.....My theory was "If you make it they will eat it." Calzone were introduced at "T's Variety" a short time later after a visit to my best friend Bob's home and a taste of his mom's delicacies. At the time not many places were serving the bread dough specialties.....and we all, including the regulars, jostled about the name and the content of the calzone. As I think back at the Variety store days, those early days, I smile, chuckle and really feel blessed!

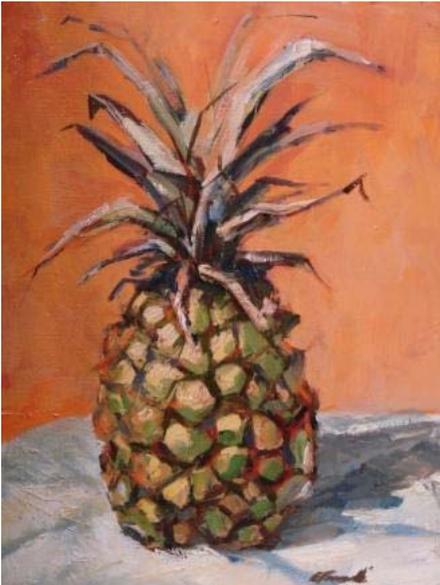
Business grew at the Budlong road location for four years. Our staff grew and Dad, a bread baker, being part of our staff allowed our food offerings to become diversified. Catering to homes and businesses was added in 1983 and wouldn't you know it.....that flourished. Three years and two kids later we decided it was time to expand.



**Renovation....Renovation....Renovation**



**Sometimes things are not up for discussion....Ask Gino**



“Welcome” Ptg. by Anthony Tomaselli

**The search** for another location was a brief one. The ad read, “For sale, Park Ave, parking for 11 cars, 1000 sq ft.” After seeing the location and deliberating for a couple of minutes we signed a sales agreement, contingent upon bank financing. Finding a bank to fund the project was more difficult than we had anticipated. If not for another good friend, Nicky D., and his recommendation to a bank, the whole deal might have fallen through.

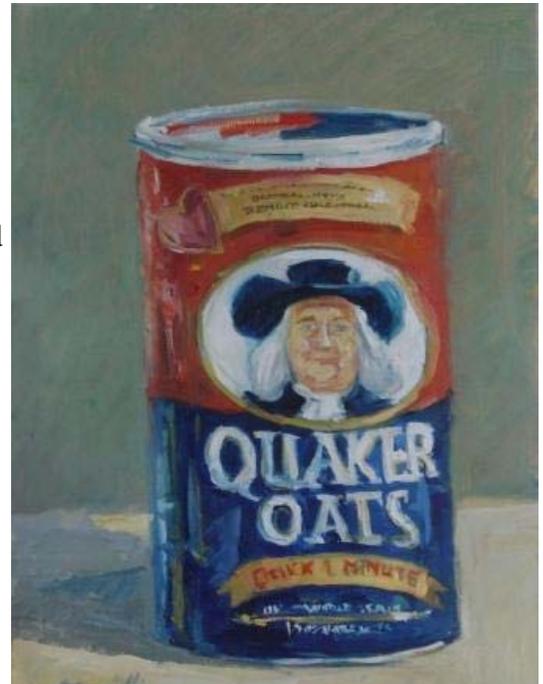
Thank-you, Nick

After 6 weeks of knocking down walls, calling equipment companies, city hall visits, painting, paving, menuing and hiring staff, “T’s on Park Ave” opened to a roaring crowd of 3 people. Elaine from the variety store and Joannie with her sister were waiting at the door. The concept was supposed to be a larger T’s Variety with tables and chairs.... total “Take Out” and counter service. We had no waitresses, no china or silverware, and no dishwashers. With-in a week a major shift in concept occurred,

full service breakfast and lunch. AHHHHHHHHHH!!!! Joannie was hired as our first waitress, she actually had no experience although she told me she did. She still works here at T’s.....how did she put up with me all of these years? The first year was a learning experience in hiring and training staff. Consistency?.....well.....it took some time, but we finally got it down. Our Catering Business (anchored by Carmino) and the Variety Store (managed by brother Joe) kept us afloat while we worked out the kinks at Park Ave. By 1988 and 1989, T’s became better known as T’s Restaurant and Catering, with a thriving breakfast, lunch and catering business. At this time we decided to sell the Variety Store to brother Joe, who, with his wife continue the tradition today.

**Time-Line 1990:** T’s enters the world of lunch delivery, recognizing the demand of our busy customers. “Good Food Fast” was always a trademark of T’s and now you could have it delivered. A feather in our cap is that we began delivery before most major chains and larger restaurants. This change became another success beyond our imagination. Always on the cutting edge, T’s began to again expand their menu to accomodate the call for healthier offerings. Grilled chickens, veggie pockets, expanded soup choices as well as fresh fruits were brought on board.

**Time-Line 1991,** Tina and I finally reached our goals, everything was running smoothly, so we thought! Enter Bruce Sundlun and the RISDIC banking Crisis. Yes, our bank was closed. Yes, all of our revenues are tied up. Discouraged? .....Yes! Give-up?.....NO! The state was in an uproar..... And so was I. As we continued to service our customers with great food and service, T’s got involved in community political forums at our Park Ave location. With the help of a local journalist Anna M., we held debates and discussions with the top local politicians. It was a highly energized time here at T’s. Weekly write-ups in the Cranston Herald, continued growth, local art shows and a windfall of recognition. Channel 10 did a 2 minute spot on their 6 pm news cast featuring T’s and my art dealing with the crisis. “Art Depco” as we called it. That was pretty exciting seeing our little place and our customers interviewed on TV.



“Wholesome” Ptg. by Anthony Tomaselli

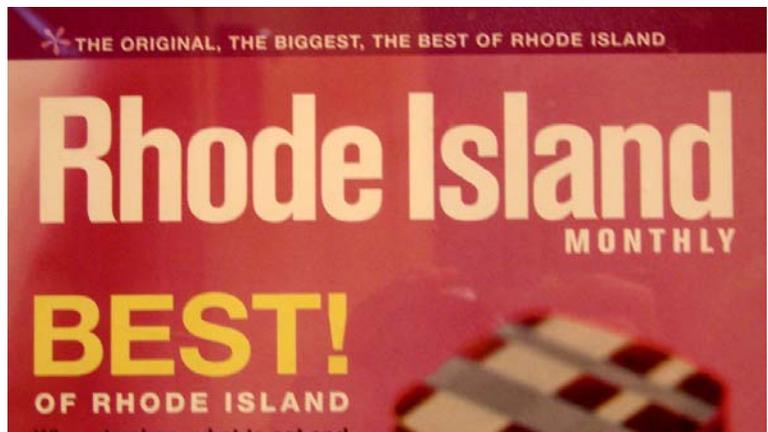


Design by Judd Brown....Const. by Link Construction 2005

**Another risky,** but necessary decision was our choice to make T's the first totally non-smoking breakfast and lunch establishment in the city of Cranston. This again was done well before all of the major chains in our community. This change actually back-fired in the short term affecting our early morning business especially. Being such a new concept at the time, people rebelled causing a substantial downturn in revenues. Discouraged? ....Yes. Give-up?....Well, you know the rest of the story.

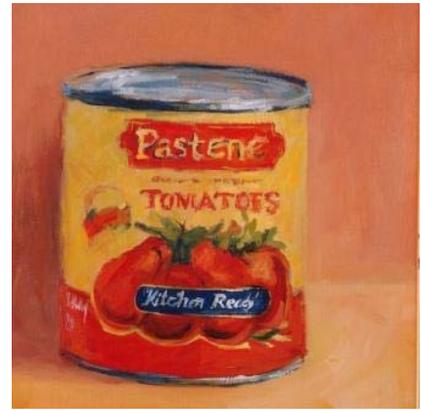
**Time-line 1995:** Enter a letter from city hall telling us to build two handicapped bathrooms. "You are kidding", was my response. "No, we're not," was theirs. Enter Judd Brown and Steve McMahon, major restaurant and country club designers. Together with Steve Torregrossa they transformed our little hole in the wall establishment into a restaurant full of color and comfort with all of the amenities of major restaurants. What we weren't ready for was the craziness that comes with expansion. More staff, larger bills, more customer needs, more maintainance, more red tape, and most of all the need for more controls. Both in the main restaurant and in our back office. At this time we decided to totally computerize. Posi-Touch computers were introduced and another learning curve for both Tina and I was about to begin..

**Four years had passed. It was November of 1998.** Were we tired?.....YES! Were we second guessing our expansion?.....to be honest.....a little! Did we throw in the towel?.....NO! We recognized the need to establish a quality management team and re-define our goals. Many other needs had to be filled, we were in the process of opening nights, marketing our new look, maintaining a growing catering clientel, policies and procedures needed to be spelled out, computerized accounting was in the process of being set up, hand books and training manuals needed to be written. "Where do we begin?" I asked my partner and wife. She looked at me and sighed..... "Fish less, paint less and work more." "Ha! That's not an option," I said keeping my cool. Just when you think that you can't handle any more, something good usually happens, (Yes, someone up there loves us). In our case it was connecting with Jennifer. Talk about timing. She was returning home from a 5 year stint with a small restaurant turned large(5) in Baton Rouge. Her hands on knowledge in all aspects of the restaurant industry is an important asset to her clear insight to restaurant growth, management and marketing. We welcomed her with open arms.. She has brought a renewed optimism and enthusiasm to T's, at a time when we needed it.



**But You Know This Already**

**Time Line Febuary 12, 2000** was our only real snow storm of the year and I was home in my art studio working on a painting.....ahhhh, relaxing. The phone rings. It's a developer from Johnston informing me that there's a business for sale that we might be interested in. We looked and immediately thought, PIZZA and Take-out. Our original idea.....take-out. There was one missing element in this grand plan of pizza. Dough.....making and formulating our own dough recipe that will be uniquely T's. We needed help. Enter Anthony DeFalco, Joannie's son, manager of a major pizza chain and ripe for a change. I called, I asked, we met. "I'd be a fool not to," was his reply.



**“Memories”....Thanks Mom and Dad**  
Ptg by Anthony Tomaselli

Here we go again, phone calls, design and concept meetings, menus etc, etc, etc,..... You know, it's not that much easier a third time.....maybe the fourth will be. On June 1, 2000 T's Pizzeria opened at 1417 Atwood Ave. Designed by Judd, constructed by Steve and managed by the two Anthony's, T's Pizzeria is off to a great beginning. Already establishing ourselves apart from the rest of the pack with the very best Food, Service and Ambiance we're looking forward to greeting and serving you all. Pizza, calzone, sandwiches and cool crisp salads.....take it out, have it delivered, or sit and relax in an old neighborhood atmosphere with the soothing music of Frank, Tony, Dean and Jerry.

**Time Line May 2004:**

Not to repeat myself.....But.....”Here we go again. Throughout the 2003 year Tina and I say a need. A need to open another location or grow our current facility. This was based on our customers (all of you) response to a formal survey as to what was lacking at T's. The answer was SEATING. You also told us that the waiting lines were too long and parking was insufficient. So, as you well know, we are good listeners. As of May 2004, we have purchased property abutting T's, we have been to zoning and we have finished our architectural drawings. We are currently trying to get a house moved as I am typing this. So far we have not been able to come up with a solution, however, I have faith. We will be open during construction.....So bear with us as we GROW TOGETHER.



Maxwell Mays named it in 1999 “The Rose Window”



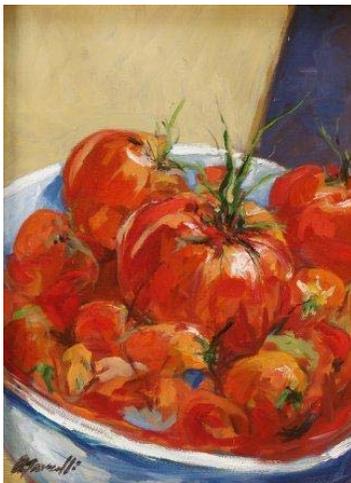
Scott from Graphic Innovations installing the “Mural” in EG

## Time Line August 16, 2005

Well hello again, and welcome back to T’s. It’s been a little over three months since we have re-opened for business after extensive renovations. Any of you that have added on to your home or have done any build out projects know how trying it can be. We were closed for 12 weeks and let me tell you it seemed like 12 months. We started February 1 and re-opened Sunday, April 24<sup>th</sup>. Tina and I would like to thank our great staff for waiting through that period with only a fraction of their pay being compensated by unemployment. We lost one employee only. Great job all.

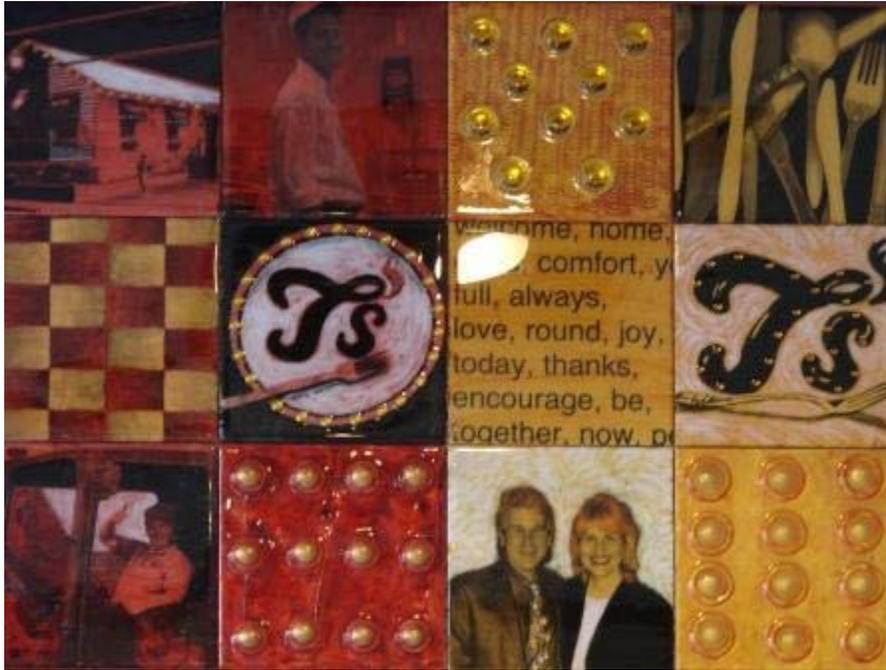
Some construction facts.....we spent 1.2 million dollars totally....140,000 in the kitchen, tables and chairs cost 50,000, landscaping 25,000.....city permits 12,000.....design and engineering was 50,000, just to give you some idea of the costs involved.

We are all very pleased with the final results of this project and would like to again thank all of you, our friends, family, and customers for making it all possible. Special thanks also to Judd Brown and his great design team and Steven Toragrossa and his construction crews. So sit back.....allow all five senses to be surrounded by the ambiance, taste, listen, see, smell and hear.....go ahead relax.....take a deep breath and feel T’s fills you with soulful nourishment for all of your five senses.



“Casey” Keeps us on task during remodeling

**The Tiles in both locations, crafted by Coral Bourgeois recall T's History**



**Throughout** the years, the staff has changed and the customer base has grown. We've gotten older and hopefully wiser. All the while there have been three consistent factors. Our families, both the immediate and the extended, our friends, and our most loyal customers. Whether you have just discovered us or whether you have been around for all 23 years.....We love and thank you all!

A special thanks to Mom and Dad Tomaselli who put up with my brash youthful energy and was there, all of the time, everytime. Also we are grateful to all of the present and past staff members. It's a great feeling to look back together as we share the fun and craziness at T's. The joy, the sweat, the tears, the anguish.....However the best feeling is the feeling of oneness we have getting through those tough days and holding each other up through those times. Knowing that you are not in this alone. Knowing that there is always a place to go to be lifted up when needed, to share good news when it happens and to be part of a family.....T's. Have we fulfilled our dream?.....You bet!  
.....Everyday!

*Still Dreaming.....Still Thankful.....Still as passionate as ever*

**Time Line February 2008**

East Greenwich here we come. Mark Blanchard, brother of Tina, has returned from Florida with his family to be a part of growing the T's team. In November 2007 Tina, Mark and I purchased "Green Tea" Asian restaurant from Armond Manaco. We initially were a bit reluctant. Tina said it was too big....Mark said the street seemed a bit quiet.....and I stayed out of it....for the time being. As we scurried around the state that day looking at other locations.....brother-in-law-Mark said.... "I think that we need to revisit East Greenwich and Green Tea. There was something there....**something there**" .....Tina and I agreed. Well here we are six months later in "The Benny"s Plaza, EG. We love it here. What a great community of people and merchants. T's East Greenwich is open for the second day as I write this....I am at the Park Ave location in Cranston.....someone has to hold down the fort, so to speak. We thank our contractors especially Steve T, Ed Y and Mario, our Designer Judd Brown....East Greenwiche's own, our staff at T's who worked training our new team, our parents, the customers at T's, and EG for such a warm welcome. Dad T, "This ones for You" ....you are still with us. And you were so right.....well most of the time anyway. ....*to be continued*