

Local Restaurateur Revives Beloved Laguna Hills Landmark

Patrick Thomas Reopens The Pizza Store, Reuniting Community Through Craft, Tradition, and Local Roots

LAGUNA HILLS, CA, UNITED STATES, January 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A longtime Laguna Hills institution is once again buzzing with life. [The Pizza Store](#), a neighborhood staple that sat vacant for more than a year, has officially reopened under the leadership of veteran restaurant operator Patrick Thomas, restoring a cherished gathering place for generations of locals.

“

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Patrick Thomas, Founder and Operating Partner of The Pizza Store

Thomas, a lifelong restaurant professional with decades of operational experience, partnered with Laguna Hills High School alumni Brenton Baskin and Damian Mate to bring the restaurant back to life. More than a reopening, the project represents a full-scale revival of a space many residents associate with their own formative memories.

“This place meant something to people,” said Patrick Thomas, founder and operating partner of The Pizza Store. “We didn't just want to reopen a pizza shop. We wanted to bring back a community hub and do it the right way, with quality ingredients, great people, and a sense of pride in what we're building.”

Originally envisioned as a light renovation, the project expanded into a comprehensive rebuild to meet modern city and health code requirements after years of closure. While nearly every system was replaced, Thomas preserved the original pizza oven—an intentional nod to the restaurant's history.

Beyond nostalgia, the revived Pizza Store emphasizes craftsmanship and local sourcing. Bread is supplied by Aliso Viejo-based Saffron Bakery, cheese is sourced from a fourth-generation Wisconsin producer, and many menu items—from sauces to meatballs—are prepared in-house. The restaurant also prioritizes employee culture, offering family meal discounts and recognition programs tied to customer feedback.

“It's incredibly rewarding to work somewhere that feels genuinely connected to the community,”

said Taylor Banfield, general manager of The Pizza Store. “You see families, students, and local teams come together here every day. It reminds you why places like this matter.”

Community involvement remains central to the business model. The Pizza Store actively supports local youth sports programs, hosts fundraisers, and continues its tradition as an all-ages gathering spot for Laguna Hills residents.

Looking ahead, Thomas is cautiously optimistic about future growth while remaining focused on sustainability. “Restaurants are a long game,” he said. “If you take care of your people and your product, the rest follows.”

The Pizza Store is now open daily in Laguna Hills.

About The Pizza Store

Founded decades ago, The Pizza Store is a Laguna Hills-based pizzeria known for its handcrafted food, welcoming atmosphere, and deep community roots. Revived in 2026 by restaurateur Patrick Thomas and local partners, the restaurant blends tradition with quality ingredients, in-house preparation, and a people-first culture. The Pizza Store serves as a gathering place for families, students, and neighbors across generations.

Learn More: <https://pizzastorebyoclocal.com>

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Patrick Thomas, Founder and Operating Partner of The Pizza Store

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