

Day in the life of a pizza lover

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Contest at Pizza 9

NOV. 22, 2019; PIZZA 9; RIO WEST MALL; 5:45 PM; GALLUP - Everyone is seated. A whole large cheese pizza sits in front of us. All that's left is the signal to start munching down on this bad boy. I am ready to take part in the Pizza 9 Pizza Eating Contest here at the Rio West Mall and I am more nervous than excited.

The competition was held Nov. 22. Family members urged me to enter this contest because of my love for pizza. That's no exaggeration. If truth be known, once I arrived in New Mexico, I pretty much lived on pizza. If there was a new pizza joint, I was there. Pepperoni pizza has

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always been my all-time favorite. Mix in a little green chili and I'm in pizza heaven. Any pizza, any topping, it doesn't matter, I simply love pizza, and entering this contest would only enhance my passion for it.

The competition drew 45 contestants from all walks of life and hungry mouths of every size. It was held in center court for everyone to see you stuff your mouth. I, like every competitor, entered online, and simply had to show up. Before the contest, I drank lots of water, after being given advice to prep myself for the event.

Thoughts raced through my head as I waited for the go ahead.

"I wonder if this person next to me will win? What happens to the leftover pizza? Wow, I really do love pizza," I thought to myself.

Marketing Director Pizza 9 Franchise, Jasmine Bouquez of Albuquerque, was pleased about the attendance at the event, especially since it was being held for the first time in Gallup. In the past they had held a couple pizza eating contests and it had gone away. Then, mall management approached Bouquez to bring the competition to Gallup.

"This was my first time doing it here and I was pretty excited," Bouquez said. "It was a good turn-out and everyone seems to be having fun, and I was so happy."

Bouquez was the emcee and narrated the progress of each competitor through each group.

Area Gallupians, including Chamber of Commerce President Bill Lee and Community Pantry Director, Alice Perez were asked to be judges and I wondered if they, too, had a secret love for pizza, as I do.

The rules were given out and water was supplied to help in the process of downing the cheese pizza.

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The judges were there to tabulate and make sure you ate the whole slice and nothing but the slice.

Groups of six contestants were called out and were given 10 minutes to eat as much pizza as they could.

Then my name was called and here I sit ready to prove my love for pizza.

“Alright, hands on the table and good luck to everyone and go.” Bouquez calls.

I open up the box before me and immediately I see the steam rising from the cheese pizza and feel the heat as I place it in my mouth. Screams and cheers can be heard as the competition starts.

My family is cheering me on, holding a sign that reads “Go Daddy.” Seeing that sign gives me a jolt of energy and it’s on.

“Go Daddy go” hits my ears and I begin on my second slice. Bouquez is urging on the audience to cheer for their family members and a wave of excitement fills the air. Mall onlookers stop to see what the racket is about and why were there people on stage shoveling pizza into their mouths at an unusual pace.

I hear Bouquez announce that a competitor has just finished their seventh slice, and I am like, ‘what?’

The two-minute warning is given, and I am now ready for my fifth pizza slice with a mouth that I was told afterwards, looked like a chipmunk storing acorns for the winter. Suddenly, I hit the dreaded wall I heard so much about. My jaw is beginning to tighten up, and I try to make more

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room in my chipmunk mouth by drinking water.

“5-4-3-2-1 alright everyone stop,” Bouquez calls out.

The contest was over, and I finished with eating only five slices, compared to my other worthy opponents. I took what pizza was left and gave it to my daughters.

Eric Jesus of Window Rock, Ariz., took third place by eating nine slices and winning \$100.

“It felt good, plus it was good, and winning some money was cool, too.” Jesus told me.

Johntian James of Vanderwagen took second place by consuming 10 slices of pizza and winning \$250. He heard about the contest on the radio.

“It was good, and I didn’t think I could eat that much pizza.” he laughed, “But I was surprised I won second. I was hoping I would be first. Almost got it, but I had a piece of pizza left. But second is good. I’m happy.”

Shane Wilson of Bluewater took first place by wolfing down a total of 11 hot piping cheese slices to take home the title of Pizza King and a nice chunk of change - \$500. Being no stranger to food competitions, Wilson competed in the Fire Rock Casino Slider eating contest taking first place there, and won fourth place in a food event on the Navajo Nation. He decided to try this competition.

“It feels pretty good to win. My mouth’s on fire. I burnt the top of my mouth, but I felt pretty good,” Wilson smiled. “I just won \$500 bucks. I’m happy and excited.”

During the contest, Pizza 9 gave away some cool prizes to the contestants and at the end, even

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gave away some free pizza. Everyone seemed to have fun and so did I.

I was asked after eating that much pizza if this tarnished my love for pizza. Definitely not. I love pizza and will 'til the day I die.

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