



Good Food, Clean, Open Late and Pies Roadside Magazine

The Vale-Rio Diner in Phoenixville, PA, founded in 1948, is celebrating its 48th anniversary this year. Founder Pat Valerio explains that hyphenating the two syllables in his name was a quick and simple solution to the question of a name when he was starting out. "It was novel," he says.

This beautiful 60-foot Paramount has changed only slightly over the years. Besides the addition, in 1970 of a modest and attractive back dining room not much has been altered. Two of the original waitresses still serve locals and visitors -- Rosemary's been here since '48 and Doris since '59, the cook has been in residence for 27 years and the dishwasher has put in 20-plus years. Most of the staff have equally long and loyal service records, but the history is only part of the story here - this is simply a great diner.

The menu claims that the Vale-Rio is "The Bright Spot of Phoenixville," and after a few minutes here one recognizes that this is no exaggeration. Food is fresh, service is fast and friendly and the silver and pink diner is so sparkling clean it's hard to imagine that Bob Dole was only 25 when the place opened. A new countertop and booths were installed a few years back, but other than that the Vale-Rio is all Paramount, down to the original clock on the canopy as you enter.

About 45 minutes west of Philadelphia on route 23W, Phoenixville is a small town 'not far from the King of Prussia Mall,' I'm told, which says a lot about how this rural area has developed. The Vale-Rio is situated at the intersection of Bridge Street and Nutt Road, a short distance from the drive-in, corporate cafeterias of McDs and KFC. But Pat says these neighbors have had little effect on his business. And with the pink-neon trimmed Paramount, the staff and a great menu, the Vale-Rio Diner is humbly continuing its 48-year tradition.

If there is any ethnic flavor on the extensive menu it is probably Italian, but classic diner fare is ample and there are lots of local favorites. The day we visited, the sandwich specials on the lunch menu were homemade meatballs and barbecued pork - both served on fresh and appropriate rolls: Italian and Kaiser, respectively, and the many vegetables included fresh fried green tomatoes. In

Pennsylvania you've got to have lots of potato dishes and your 'seven sweets and sour' so there are other vegetable choices like beets, applesauce, pepper cabbage and of course, slaw. But Pat is a definitely into meats and there are great roasts, ham and veal. "The cutlet is probably the most popular dish," Pat explains. "We make everything and buy all our meats, fish and poultry fresh. There is no 'portion-control' and nothing is pre-fabricated," he said proudly. "It's true," Helen, one of the waitresses says as she passes by, "he's known for his veal and his quality!"

Pennsylvanians like their pie and the Vale-Rio is doing its part to satisfy the market demand. "We move quite a bit of pie," Pat says with typical understatement. "We bake all our pies. People are more diet-conscious than when we started making pies in '48, when we were baking 15 to 18 a day. We offer more salads now, but we still move a lot of pie." We had the fresh peach crumb and when we saw one of Phoenixville's finest come in and order a slice of the peanut butter pie we sampled that, too. "That's good pie," he said, in simple, Valerian-style speech.

Pat sold most of the business to a group of partners in 1990, but he's not ready to retire. "I love this business," he said repeatedly. Our waitress, Patty told us he's usually at the diner late on most nights and is 'very hands-on,' still involved in food preparation. "He's a dear," she said, giving him a hug.

Another way to appreciate the Vale-Rio is to recognize the hours when it's open, which is easier if you remember that it's only closed between 11pm and 5am Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Chances are, if you drive by, it's open.

The Vale-Rio Diner Bridge Street and Nutt Road Phoenixville, PA 19460 933-3988 Open M-W
5am-11pm, Th, F & S-24hrs, Sunday until 11pm

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