

# What It Is! Journal Extra

By Art Finkelstien

## SECRET SERVICE RAIDS ESSINGTON LANDMARK

On Wednesday, October 6, 1997, Agents of the United States Secret Service raided Romano's of Essington. Tipped off by Philadelphia International Airport Officials, members of the elite Air Force One Presidential Guard were allegedly, "concerned with the President's best interests." President Clinton, in town for a \$5000 a plate Democratic fund raising dinner, may or may not have been aware of the situation as it occurred but speculation concerning his direct involvement is plentiful. "He must have known what was going on", said Owner Pete Romano Jr. "We were warned that they were coming about two weeks ago and we were ready for them when they got here." The official time of the incident was 6:00pm on Wednesday evening, with Agents infiltrating Romano's hours prior to President Clinton's Philadelphia departure. Romano's, a long standing Essington landmark since 1941, has had a "run in" with the government once before. "A few years ago they showed up for the same reason and we gave them more than their money's worth even then", said a confident Romano. The Agents returned to Air Force One with approximately 28 items in their possession and apparently loaded the articles directly into the plane's passenger compartment (where President Clinton and his aides are seated). No one was hurt in the incident

and \$121.70 was left by the Secret Service as compensation for the items.

What prompted the raid? Was it a plot to kill the President or perhaps an illegal operation? Sources close to the What It Is! Journal have learned that the Secret Service was participating in an exercise designed only to feed the President! (Sorry for the let down but I knew the build up would get your attention!) With a reputation for some of the best cheese steaks and stromboli's in the Delaware Valley, Romano's received a request from Air Force One two weeks prior to the President's visit. "They requested 28 cheese steaks, with mushrooms and peppers, two weeks ago and we threw in a few extra stromboli's, hats and t-shirts", said Pete Romano Jr. It is not certain if the President was directly responsible for the order but it is reasonable to assume that he ate a Romano's cheese steak on the short flight back to Washington.

"Sure it makes you feel good when the leader of the free world may be sampling one of your products. It certainly makes me feel great considering the circumstances behind my father's immigration to America and consequential success in this country", said Pete Romano Sr. Pete's father Nazzareno, the originator of Romano's, was forced to flee

Italy in the late 1920's. Nat, as he was affectionately called by friends, was active in the resistance against the Fascist government of Mussolini and relocated to the Philadelphia area in search of a better life. "My father was a stone mason by trade but I can remember his first venture



Romano's as it looked in 1944

into the pizza business. He would make the pizzas at home, wheel them down to my uncle's bakery in a wooden cart, then wheel them back up Washington Ave. in South Philly. He would yell Pizza! Pizza! in the middle of the street", recalled Romano Sr. Nat Romano moved his business to Essington on December 1, 1944. Pete Romano Sr. explained, "When my father first came to Delaware County no one knew what Pizza was. On the front of his store he had a hand painted sign that read Pizzeria. Everyone in the neighborhood just assumed Pizzeria was his last name. They called him Mr. Pizzeria for a long time. Its hard for many of us to imagine life without pizza but at that time pizza was only prevalent in the Italian community." The history of Romano's was very interesting and the interview quickly focused on the Romano's tradition.

"Romano Sr. described a thriving and active Essington waterfront. "Back in the old days there were boats everywhere in Essington. The boats were predominantly wooden, not fiberglass, so the yacht owners were down here year round to get ready for summer. Our restaurant was a favorite eatery of the owners and you never knew who would be sitting in the booth next to you. In fact, we still have two employees that can remember those days. Martha Bell has been working for the family for 39 years and Mary Dipaul for 30. The history behind this business is amazing."

The history associated with Romano's Restaurant is amazing but the most fascinating story is the famous legend of the stromboli. Unlike the pizza, the stromboli

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Romano's today, two blocks from the original site

**Secret Service at Romano's**

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was not a recipe brought over from the old country. Romano Sr. explained, "In 1950 Ingrid Bergman was making a movie, on the Island of Stromboli, with a famous Italian actor named Roberto Rossolini. Mrs. Bergman was married to Dr. Lars Lindstrom back in the States but proceeded to have an affair with Rossolini. In those days things like that were not common and the issue ruined the young actresses' career. My father had this "special" sandwich that he just called a sandwich. My sisters boyfriend, William Schofield, came in one day and asked my father the name of the sandwich. My father said, I don't know, you name it. Since the stromboli incident was relevant, my brother in law said, Call it a stromboli. The name stuck and my sister married William. He has been a part of the family ever since and I even made up a shirt for him that tells the story of the stromboli." The debate over the original stromboli is still highly contested but it seems that Romano's has a legitimate claim to the stromboli throne. The Romano's stromboli is different than the stromboli you may be used to but it is the original and it is delicious. They use a special mix, to form a crispy bread (unlike the fluffy pizza dough used for most stromboli). It may not look like your everyday stromboli but Romano's is not your everyday pizza shop.

Fortunately you don't have to be in the Secret Service to raid Romano's. Anyone with a couple of dollars can choose from a wide variety of Italian specialties, as well as breakfast. Their prices are extremely reasonable and they accept Visa and Mastercard. Romano's is conveniently located, one block from the Lagoon, on 246 Wanamaker Ave. They also sell lottery tickets and have their own Web Site at [http://www.quick page.com/R/romano](http://www.quickpage.com/R/romano).

**Romano's**  
246 Wanamaker Ave., Essington, PA  
(610) 521-9010  
7am to 10pm, Seven days a week.



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**Oct 31st** - Halloween "Supper Spooker" with Don't Ask; **Nov 1st** - Mood Swing (formerly Stoned); **Nov. 8th** - Rocket 88 featuring Dr. Harmonica; **Nov. 14 & 15th** - Tongue & Groove