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### FOOD > RESTAURANT NEWS

# Plano restaurant giving away free meals despite economic impact of coronavirus crisis

Ram Mehta of In-Fretta restaurant said his religion and parents instilled in him a deep desire to help others.



Azhar Subedar (from left), Ram Mehta, Ali Siraj and Ali Samana organize freshly prepared meals for delivery at In-Fretta in Plano on April 2, 2020. (Jason Janik / Special Contributor)

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By [Teri Webster](#)

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Profits are plunging and businesses are closing amid the coronavirus crisis, but a Plano restaurant remains committed to helping others in need.

**In-Fretta**, a New York-style pizza and wings restaurant, donated more than 3,000 meals over the past two weeks despite losing about 80% of its business since the coronavirus outbreak began.

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The outreach effort is helping community members who are struggling, health care workers and others, said Ram Mehta, 43, a Plano resident and one of the owners of In-Fretta.

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But In-Fretta’s commitment to serving the community was established long before the coronavirus.

Mehta practices the Sikh religion, which incorporates the belief that you should help others regardless of their background or religion, he said, adding that he grew up in a well-to-do family in Delhi, India, where his parents assisted the less fortunate.



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BY *The Dallas Morning News*

Following their example, Mehta and his co-owners opened In-Fretta in September 2018 with a policy of giving a free meal to anyone who cannot afford to pay. The restaurant gave away about 100 cheese pizzas a week at first, which has grown to about 400, Mehta said.

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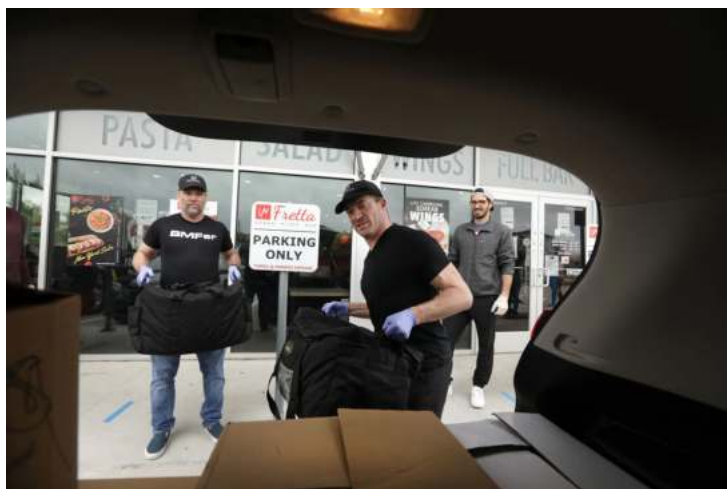
Now in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak, the number of people seeking help has grown. Some of the meals they've prepared have gone to health care workers at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas. Other free food is being distributed from the restaurant.

“We have a very famous restaurant, but we did not get there without the community,” Mehta said. “They come and eat and support us so when times are bad, this is the least we can do.”

The far-reaching economic impact of the pandemic is reflected in some of the people who are seeking help.

“We've had people driving up in Mercedes Benzes and BMWs,” Mehta said.

While passing out food from the restaurant's pickup window, employees and volunteers are closely following all COVID-19 precautions such as social distancing, wearing gloves and masks, and regularly cleaning all surfaces, Mehta said.



Jeremy Soder, a volunteer from Body Machine Fitness, loads freshly prepared meals into a delivery vehicle at In-Fretta in Plano on April 2, 2020. (Jason Janik / Special Contributor)

When deliveries are made, drivers leave packaged food on the hood of the delivery car and wait until the customer comes over to get it, he added.

Funding is coming from his personal savings, Mehta said. The business used to bring in more than \$100,000 a month and now is straining to pay utilities, a \$12,500-a-month lease and his employees, he said.

“We’re hurting, too,” he said. “But I can always make more money. It’s not about how much money you have. It’s about what’s in the heart.”

Another business owner and friend is helping to offset the cost of providing the free food. Ali Samana, owner of 1 Solar Solution in Frisco, a solar panel installation company, has some of his employees volunteering at the restaurant. He has also helped make deliveries.

“A huge crisis like this will show the true colors of a community,” Samana said.

In-Fretta crew member April Davis of Plano said she is proud to be a part of what the restaurant is doing.

“During these times, it’s very good to work for someone like Ram,” Davis said. “It makes me feel better that I’m a part of it, and it’s great to see what he’s doing.”



Juan José Orosco makes pizza at In-Fretta in Plano on April 2, 2020. (Jason Janik / Special Contributor)

Mehta’s desire to help others has deep roots. He said his father, Ashok Mehta, runs a high school in India where 30% of the students are low income and receive free education, food and clothing.

His late mother, Lata Mehta, never bought luxury items even though she could have afforded them, Mehta said. There were no birthday parties with lavish gifts while he was a child, and his mother would take him to orphanages where they would cook meals and serve the children.

While she was still alive, Mehta promised his mom that he would carry on her tradition.

“She always believed in giving,” he said.

Now, at In-Fretta, a sign on the entrance reads: “If you are hungry, homeless or can’t afford a meal, please honor us by stopping by during business hours for a couple of slices of hot pizza and a cup of water at no charge.”

The sign also lists Mehta’s cellphone number and states that any non-paying customer who is not treated with the same respect as a paying customer should call him.

As a small business, the restaurant relies on word of mouth, Mehta said. How good is the word of mouth? Jay Leno, the former *Tonight Show* host, stopped by the restaurant last year for a few slices, and In-Fretta has the photos on its [Facebook page](#) to prove it.

“You beat them by quality,” he said.

And that goes beyond the food.

“We have to be more grateful and less selfish,” Mehta said. “You can have an opportunity to make money, but sometimes you have to be a man and step up and take care of others.

“It’s all about the heart.”



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**In Fretta Pizza Wings Bar 2**

about a year ago

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2

As a pizza restaurant, In-Fretta competes with large restaurant chains by focusing on customer service and using high-quality cheese and dough and tasty homemade sauces, Mehta said. There isn't a single microwave oven in the place, he added.

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[Teri Webster](#). Teri Webster is a freelancer covering Plano for The Dallas Morning News. She has worked as a staff writer and freelancer for several area news outlets and is a regular contributor to Fort Worth Weekly. Email story tips to [writerteriw@gmail.com](mailto:writerteriw@gmail.com).



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