The Zest S8E19
===

Andrew Tambuzzo: [00:00:00] It may sound weird coming from a butcher, but it would be okay if you ate less meat, as long as when you did, it was a higher quality product.

Dalia Colon: I'm Dalia Colon, and this is The Zest: citrus, seafood, Spanish flavor, and Southern Charm. The Zest celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State. Today, we're checking in with Tampa's Prince of Pork, Andrew Tambuzzo.

It's one thing to know how the sausage gets made. It's another thing to buy the pigs that become the sausage. But that's just what Andrew Tambuzzo recently did. Andrew is the founder and owner of The Boozy Pig Butchery and Kitchen in Tampa, which has locations in South Tampa and Davis Islands. If his name sounds familiar, Andrew was a guest back in 2019 when he gave us a tour of Boozy Pig.

In addition to selling pork products to the public, Boozy supplies meat to [00:01:00] dozens of restaurants, hotels, and other wholesale clients. To ensure the quality of that meat, Andrew recently purchased around 50 pigs of his own. They live on a farm in Pasadena. Now, buying livestock for your restaurant may sound extreme, but Andrew comes from a foodie family.

His late grandfather, Giuseppe Tambuzzo, owned Tip Top Grocery Store in Ybor City, and his cousin, John Barbie, was featured on The Zest earlier this year for his Tip Top Canning Company. I recently met up with Andrew at the Boozy Pigs South Tampa location at lunch hour was winding down. We actually sat at a table that moments earlier had been occupied by former Tampa mayor, Bob Buckhorn.

In this conversation, Andrew explains why buying the pigs was important to him, how pork products are made (buckle up for that one!) And how to make more flavorful meals from less expensive cuts of meat. [00:02:00]

Andrew Tambuzzo: So growing up I was fortunate enough to get to hang out with my grandparents and a lot of those summer breaks and a lot of those winter breaks included hanging out with him and going with him to his, they still own the grocery store, but he was like semi retired. But he would still go in ,you know, half dozen times out of the year just to make sausage to pass out to all of his friends and people that were buying it from him, men that he played cards or dominoes with. And so he would take me around and I just got to learn from him and some of the other old men just how to make sausage. That eventually became a family tradition where for all the big holidays throughout the year, Father's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas.

We were absolutely making sausage, getting together as a family and making sausage. And my grandfather decided one day he was done. He wanted to hang it up. And so my father had the idea to build out a little room in our garage and move all of his equipment there. [00:03:00] And just to kind of have some space to keep that tradition going.

And so that was really my first space where I could go and play and test recipes, but also keep the tradition going as well. And that's what it was for the first three or four years was just. Just making that same recipe, maybe a few variations of it, and selling to a lot of the same families that used to buy from him.

And we actually started with the same, you know, contact list that he had, just his handwriting, names and numbers, that we would just start calling, Hey, listen, we're making sausage again. Let us know if you want to get on the list. And little by little, we were able to expand the product line. We were able to to really tap back into the market of Old Tampa, that people

that were looking for that type of product and we were selling it out of the house on top of that.

So yeah, I was very fortunate to have that upbringing on both my, both sides of my family, my mom and my father's side. Traditionally, it was always grocery stores, meat markets, cooking. And so [00:04:00] yeah, very fortunate.

Dalia Colon: Wow. So you grew up learning literally how the sausage is made.

Andrew Tambuzzo: Yes. Absolutely.

Dalia Colon: What, here in Tampa?

Andrew Tambuzzo: In Tampa, in Ybor City, and then in, at my grandfather's house in Seminole Heights.

Dalia Colon: What was the name of the store?

Andrew Tambuzzo: Tip Top Grocery. It was on 5th Avenue and 18th Street. The original building was on 13th and 26th, but when I 4 got built, they were forced to move. And so, they moved it. to 5th Avenue and 18th Street.

Dalia Colon: What was your grandfather doing making sausage? My grandfather doesn't know how to make sausage.

Andrew Tambuzzo: So after World War II, they came back home and my grandfather's family, his uncles, they all had grocery stores already. And so him and his, my grandfather and his partner decided, let's open up our own store.

We'll be able to serve this. sector of the community. And so my great uncle, great great uncle, gave him, passed down that recipe to my grandfather. And it's the same recipe we still make today.

Dalia Colon: Oh, that's amazing. Speaking of your family and the Tip Top grocery store, [00:05:00] we recently interviewed your cousin, John Barbie, of Tip Top Canning, and he was teaching me all about canning and pickling.

Andrew Tambuzzo: Oh, yeah.

Dalia Colon: That's cool. Do you have another cousin that, like, makes the bread and then you guys can just join forces and you have a whole sandwich.

Andrew Tambuzzo: Maybe in the future. Maybe in the future.

Dalia Colon: What was your grandfather's name, by the way?

Andrew Tambuzzo: Joe Tambuzzo.

Dalia Colon: Joe Tambuzzo. Oh, I like that. That's nice and Italian. Is he still around?

Andrew Tambuzzo: He is not, unfortunately.

Dalia Colon: Okay. But you're carrying on the tradition.

Andrew Tambuzzo: We're trying.

Dalia Colon: And you're moving it forward.

Andrew Tambuzzo: Yeah. Yeah. And the last few years we've been really been able to, to really expand and get our, our name and our brand around Tampa.

We've been able to pick up wholesale clients where they're featuring our proteins on their menus, close to 20 different wholesale accounts.

Now we also have a second location on Davis Island that recently opened a few months back. That's going pretty well. We also have some vending machines, meat vending machines that are around town.

Dalia Colon: Okay, let's talk about that because I saw one right in front of this location, which is what, the South Tampa location?

Andrew Tambuzzo: Yes.

Dalia Colon: Who buys meat [00:06:00] from a vending machine?

Andrew Tambuzzo: Uh, you know, that was a good question, but I had the original idea to do this. It's definitely not an original idea for the meat vending machine, but to at least to bring it to our, our, our city, our community during COVID. There was a lot of people that couldn't get proteins or we just couldn't facilitate it fast enough.

Lines were crazy. A lot of people were worried about contact and being around other people. So I said, So let's try the vending machine out and actually did really well in the beginning. It's actually the one outside. I do have two other ones around town. There's one inside the Davis Island location and there's also one that we just put in the Duckweed downtown.

Dalia Colon: What's Duckweed? That's the grocery store, right?

Andrew Tambuzzo: It is. Duckweed is an urban market. I think they started out in downtown Tampa and they've been able to expand all around Tampa. Oh my God. There's one on Davis Island. There's one in West Shore. I believe there's one in Wesley Chapel, maybe another one someplace else, St. Pete or something.

Dalia Colon: So like what's... Something someone might buy from a meat vending machine.

Andrew Tambuzzo: So you can absolutely find, [00:07:00] um, our Italian sausage, our family recipe. You can find four different types of sausages in there, you can find two or three different flavors of burgers, you can find beef jerky, you can find snack sticks, you can find smoked sausages on occasion.

That's really it. There's quite a few flavors of snack sticks. that takes up a lot of room and the rest would be the raw proteins.

Dalia Colon: Okay, I have seen cupcake vending machines and champagne, so I guess it's not that weird. You could just go around town and make a whole meal out of all the different things.

Right. We gotta talk about the pigs. Sure. You bought some pigs?

Andrew Tambuzzo: Yeah. Kind of a crazy story. We recently were able to purchase what was left of a herd of pigs from my former pig farmer. We have since taken over the herd and moved them to our own location. And we're the ones caring for them, feeding them, watering them, doing all the things that need to be done.

Dalia Colon: What do you mean what was left of a herd of pigs?

Andrew Tambuzzo: So [00:08:00] long story, she, my former farmer decided to get out of the business. And before she could, I guess, sell off all of her pigs to whoever else, I wanted to make sure I could maintain the quality and

consistency of pork that we've established ourself with, that we've built a brand and a reputation with.

I also wanted to ensure the future of my pork supply and to ensure the high quality pork that we were bringing in was the same, we're going to continue to bring in. So I did a lot of soul searching that during that time. And I figured, you know, why not this, everything about it seemed right. Everything about it felt good.

The interactions with the pigs is like no other. It's a really great feeling. It's really satisfying to see them happy and being able to do what it is that they do in the wild and in nature and not, not have to worry about. The pigs I'm bringing in, the pork I'm bringing in, am I gonna have enough? Is it gonna be the same quality as the last one I brought [00:09:00] in Are not really a whole lot of farmers that are set up to keep up with our demand, um, our usage.

So I just felt that it was the right thing to do for us to try to secure that.

Dalia Colon: So what is your demand and what makes quality pork? Is it what they're fed? Is it that they're out roaming around in the prairie?

Andrew Tambuzzo: A little bit of both. So yeah, having access to a natural forge natural diet. Having the room to, to roam and graze as they will, they do, I mean, a lot of it comes back to their diet, which they are given a very specific diet.

We get it from a local feed mill in Dade City. And then on top of that, they're given all types of vegetable scraps, at least the ones that are, that are good for them that either come from the restaurant or my home or different friends and family that, you know, save me their scraps.

Dalia Colon: So it's like natural composting?

Andrew Tambuzzo: Pretty much. Yeah, just giving it, giving it all back to them. And yeah, also the breed has a lot to do with the flavor. [00:10:00]

Dalia Colon: Okay. So quality, quality ingredients make quality pork.

Andrew Tambuzzo: Yeah, absolutely. It's a, it's a 19 day difference in the product from what you, what is accessible at the grocery stores from what's.

Accessible at pretty much any other restaurant in town.

Dalia Colon: Who are you supplying to, by the way? You said wholesalers, but who are they?

Andrew Tambuzzo: So we sell to quite a few restaurants around town, a few hotels. Um, nobody is buying the, the. We have, we barely have enough just [00:11:00] to supply ourselves at the moment. Uh, but in the future, maybe that could be something that could, we could offer on that scale.