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Eddie & Sam's New York Pizza is authentic, right down to water from the Catskills

By Tom Scherberger, Times Staff Writer
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Eddie & Sam's New York Pizza owner Mike Sarmat aims for a product that isn't merely New York style but is authentically New York.

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TAMPA

To some, great pizza is all about the oven — the bricks, the wood, the coal, whatever. To others it's the yeast, the sauce, the cheese, the toppings.

But to Mike Sarmat, it's the water.

You can't make New York City pizza without New York City water, he says. And that's what Eddie & Sam's is all about: "We don't want to sell New York *style*, we want to sell authentic New York pizza in Tampa."

That means using New York City water to go with the New York City flour, yeast, sauce, cheese. He tried Tampa water when the shop opened 12 years ago, "but we couldn't make it the same. The taste and feel are different."

So every couple of months a truck pulls up to the corner of Tampa and Twiggs streets downtown and unloads more than 1,000 gallons of water.

It's not actually New York City tap water. It's spring water from the Catskills, but since that's where New York City gets its water — after a brief stop at a reservoir — it works, Sarmat says.

He made pizza at a shop back home in Long Island before he was recruited by the original owner, Eddie Haas, a former pizzamaker from Brooklyn (who added Sam to the name in honor of the guy who gets a cut of the profits, Uncle Sam). Eddie still stops in once a week, Sarmat says.

It may seem a tad obsessive to truck water in 1-gallon bottles all the way from New York, but no less an authority than celebrated chef Mario Batali says it's key. "Water is huge," Batali told *Wired* magazine. At Del Posto, Batali's high-end Italian restaurant recently awarded four stars by the *New York Times*, Batali adjusts the chemistry of the tap water to more closely match what he found in Italy.

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The pizza at Eddie & Sam's certainly tastes like classic New York City pizza — thin crust, a little crispy, a little chewy. And, as Sarmat says, "It's foldable." Which, as any New Yorker will tell you, is the only way to eat a slice of New York City pizza — pick it up, fold it so it's not so wide, chew.

Slices range from \$2.33 to \$3.75 (\$2.79 for a one-topping slice). Whole pies are an enormous 20 inches and range from \$16.50 to \$22.95. The menu also includes salads, pasta, wings and subs.

Eddie & Sam's has always had a hole-in-the-wall look, like many New York City pizza joints, but some recent renovations added a little polish — but not too much, Sarmat is quick to point out. New tables and chairs, a new display case, but still narrow, with walls covered with NYC photos.

The toppings are mostly standard New York fare — pepperoni, sausage, mushrooms, onions — along with a few more unusual combos, like the lasagna supreme (ground beef and ricotta).

New York expats love the place.

"Their pizza is like no other," said Nancy Kipnis, who runs a Tampa marketing and public relations firm. "It's truly, truly as New York as you can get."

>> **If you go**
Eddie & Sam's

New York Pizza
203 E Twiggs St., Tampa.

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