

# Pizza Man 'Smokes' Competition

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Lenny Rago, co-owner of Panino's Pizza, took second place in the Pan category of the International Pizza Challenge held last month at the annual International Pizza Expo in Las Vegas.

Panino's runs three locations in Park Ridge, Evanston and Chicago. Since its inception in 2007, the International Pizza Challenge attracts hundreds of pizzaioli from around the world. Rago was one of 30 competitors in the Pan division. Participants competed in five divisions: Traditional, Non-Traditional, Pan, Pizza Napoletana and Gluten-Free.

Rago's award-winning pizza is called "Smoke". It is made with Italian sausage, applewood smoked bacon, smoked mozzarella, Galbani cheeses, mozzarella, green pepper and fresh basil topped with a smoked pesto mousse and smoke-flavored olive oil.

The crust was made using 1-2-3 Pizza Crust Mix from Via Pizzeria, a company Rago also owns.

"It was a full field of incredible pizzas," Rago said. "Many people said this was one of the toughest competitions the Pan division has seen in years."

Rago won more than \$2,000 in cash and prizes from sponsors, which he plans to use toward competing in the 2017 Pizza World Championship in Italy.

Rago, a member of the United States Pizza team, has been competing in pizza competitions worldwide for the past five years.

Rago began working in the restaurant industry at the age of 14 working at Nick's La Cantina in Des Plaines where he honed his pizza-making skills. He lives in Mount Prospect with his wife and children.



## Can Taste It Now

Lenny Rago of Panino's Pizza in Park Ridge displays his second place award-winning pizza called "Smoke".