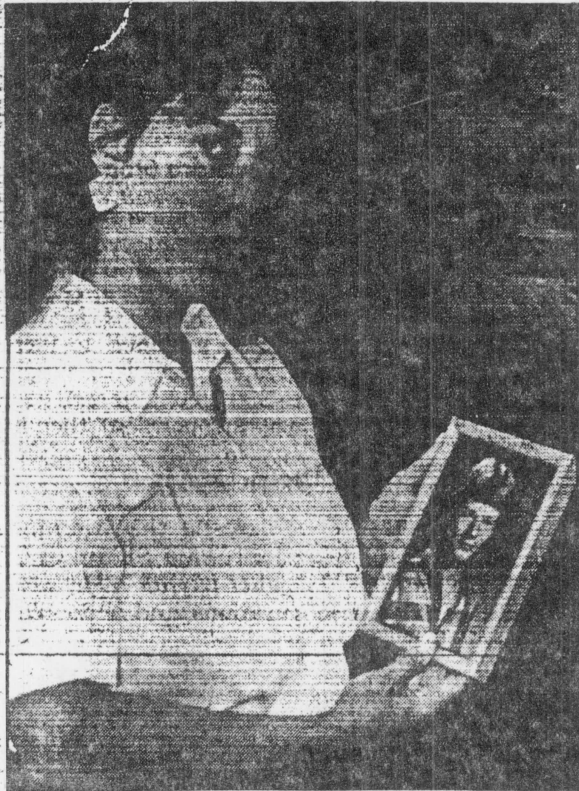


A deadly delivery problem



Globe photo/Kemp Smith
Suzanne Boutros of Indianapolis holds a portrait of her son, 17-year-old Jesse Colson, who was killed in an accident last month as he was delivering pizza in a Domino's truck.

Critics say pioneering pledge drives many to risk their lives

By Michael Kelly
Special to the Globe

CHICAGO — Speed has always been of the essence for Domino's Pizza. The Michigan company's pioneering promise to home-deliver a pizza within 30 minutes of a phone order boosted it from a single pizzeria in 1960 to the second-largest pizza operation in the world, with 5,000 outlets and \$2.3 billion in sales last year. But now a growing number of critics are saying that, in Domino's case at least, speed kills.

Last year, according to the company's own records, accidents involving Domino's drivers cost 20 lives — 18 of them during pizza runs. The company would not say how many of the victims were Domino's drivers. Company spokesman Ron Hingst, while hastening to say that "even one death is too many," said that with 230 million pizzas delivered last year, this works out to only about one death per 11.5 million pies. "We're not minimizing the deaths by any means," Hingst said. "But that is what the mathematics come out to."

Domino's critic Joseph A. Kinney finds little comfort in Hingst's statistic. "Great," he said.

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Critics say Domino's promise is deadly for drivers

■ DOMINO'S

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"Now we know the value of the life of a 17-year-old: 11.5 million pizzas."

Kinney, the director of the Chicago-based National Safe Workplace Institute, an independent research and advocacy group, has come up with his own statistic.

Domino's employs between 70,000 and 80,000 part-time drivers. Assuming that this amounts to the equivalent of 20,000 full-time drivers — four for each of the 5,000 Domino's outlets — Kinney claims that 20 deaths in 1988 means that Domino's drivers face a death rate between three and six times higher than that in the construction industry and twice as high as that of miners.

"The point is this," Kinney said. "Would parents let their kids drive for Domino's if they knew they were three times more likely to die doing that than they would be working construction?"

Suzanne Boutros can answer that one. Her 17-year-old son was the latest Domino's driver to die, the only one so far this year. Hustling to deliver pizzas in the semirural area west of Indianapolis, Jesse Colson often covered 100 miles a night. His mother and others who knew him say he was proud that he almost always made the delivery within the 30-minute limit and was determined never to get the "King of the Lates" badge allegedly given every week by his franchise to the driver most often late on deliveries.

Colson died on June 3 when the company-owned Toyota pickup he was driving in a delivery run swerved off a wet road and struck a utility pole. Domino's has offered the family about \$4,000 in worker's compensation to cover funeral costs, Boutros said. Kinney estimates that the 20 deaths in 1988 cost Domino's about \$70,000 in death benefits, and he and other critics argue that Domino's is unconcerned because the cost is so low.

Kinney has written to Thomas Monaghan, founder and 97 percent owner of the company, asking that Domino's pay \$500,000 to each accident victim, abandon the 30-minute rule and hire only drivers 18 or older.

Colson's mother calls Domino's guarantee to deliver each pizza within 30 minutes or knock \$3 off the price "a license to speed," and she and family friends blame it in large part for Colson's death. They have started a petition drive asking for federal restrictions on the policy; the petitioners have delivered their first batch of more than 1,200 signatures to the Indianapo-

lis offices of Republican Sen. Richard Lugar.

"They have made me angry and now I'm fighting," Boutros said. "There's nothing they can do to bring my son back and that hurts — there are days I can hardly stand it — but I feel I am doing this for my son. I know I can't help him, but I figure maybe the reason he died is so someone would stand up to Domino's on this."

Domino's faces criticism and legal action on other fronts as well:

- In Salem, Mass., Charles Dunbar, a 22-year-old motorcycle driver allegedly struck by a Domino's driver in Lynn last July, has sued the company for damages. Dunbar's attorney, Daniel Crane, says his client suffered a compound fracture of the left femur and was unable to work for a year.

- In Indiana, the state Department of Labor is looking into the Colson case to determine whether Domino's policy constitutes a violation of the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act under the agency's jurisdiction, said spokesman David Bear.

- In Pittsburgh, attorney Kenneth R. Behrend has filed suit on behalf of Franklin and Mary J. Kranack, who he says suffered neck, back and arm injuries when their car was broadsided by a driver leaving a Domino's store in July 1985. Kranack alleges that the store manager rushed to the scene of the wreck and yelled, "Let's get this pizza on the road!"

In addition to unspecified monetary damages, Behrend is seeking to force Domino's to abandon the 30-minute rule, which he calls "a grossly negligent corporate policy." Behrend is also helping other lawyers around the country press cases against the company and is attempting to organize an information network to coordinate the filing of cases in different jurisdictions.

The unusually widespread attacks have Domino's officials somewhat worried. "We recognize that we have a perception problem," said Hingst. "We are taking a lot of heat now."

But the company has not responded to either the Indianapolis petitioners or to Kinney. And it is not considering dropping or revising its delivery policy, said Hingst. "The 30-minute guarantee is very, very important to our customers," he said.

Hingst said the company has always encouraged drivers to take care, has never penalized late drivers and will now place even greater emphasis on safe driving.

On June 21, after Jesse Colson's death, the company sent a letter to its corporate-owned stores and its franchises stating that it is company policy to hire drivers 18 or older. The directive, however, is not binding on the franchises, and they constitute two-thirds of the Domino's outlets. Kinney charges that "the vast majority" of Domino's drivers are under 18.

Hingst said the company is also urging franchise owners and store managers to promote safe driving and will soon put into ef-



Charles Dunbar, 22, of Salem sued Domino's Pizza after his leg was broken in a collision with a delivery truck last year.

fect a new safety course for its drivers.

Domino's executives say the system does not promote fast or reckless driving. They say the speed takes place in the store — not on the road. "We can custom-make a pizza within 10 to 12 minutes," said Hingst. "And our average delivery area is only 1 to 2 miles, so there is enough time to deliver."

Christopher Rogers, who owns Massachusetts Domino's stores in Medford, Arlington, Somerville and Winchester, said: "We never ask a driver to break the speed limit. We never want them to do anything to make haste on the road."

However, interviews with current and former Domino's employees suggest the company's critics may be right. While Domino's

franchisees, managers and executives do not actively encourage reckless driving, the 30-minute rule acts as an inherent encouragement, putting great pressure on the drivers, they said.

Vivek Handi Parde, a 21-year-old University of Virginia student who has worked at Baltimore-area Domino's outlets off and on for three years, said the company's self-vaunted quality of "hustle" is "just a euphemism for doing everything fast, and that includes driving."

Parde, who says he quit two weeks ago in anger over Domino's policies, said he and other drivers "speeded all the time. I would speed at least 80 percent of the time, run stop signs anything to make those deliveries."

Paul, a 19-year-old driver in Chicago who asked that his last name not be used, said many managers "get uptight when pizzas are running late and start yelling at everyone to hurry up, hurry up."

Lane Tarleton, a franchise consultant for six months of 1987 in Domino's southern regional headquarters, said: "There's a lot of pressure to speed. It's not written but it's there. A driver goes out with three or four deliveries, and he ends up with a minute to get to the last one and he's two minutes away, he's going to speed, he's going to cut corners."

Parde would like to see the 30-minute rule abolished. "There's no reason 20 people a year should get killed over pizza," he said. "Pe-



City of Cambridge

31.

IN CITY COUNCIL

August 7, 1989

COUNCILLOR DUEHAY

- WHEREAS: Recent statistics concerning Domino's Pizza reveal that last year accidents involving Domino's drivers cost 20 lives, 18 of them during Pizza runs; and
- WHEREAS: An application for a Domino's Pizza fast-food restaurant is currently pending for a building being erected at the corner of Broadway and Prospect Street; and
- WHEREAS: The Cambridge Traffic and Parking Department has cited this corner as already dangerous and traffic-laden; and
- WHEREAS: Residents have repeatedly petitioned the City Council to prevent a Domino's pizza establishment from opening at this location; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED: That the City Council hereby requests the City Manager to take all legal steps available immediately to prevent this establishment from being located at Broadway and Prospect Streets.

attachment

In City Council August 7, 1989.
Adopted by the affirmative vote of 9 members.
Attest:- Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

Joseph E. Connarton
Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

Order #31

F-319

C. Duehay re: resoltuions requesting the City
Manager to take all available legal steps immed-
iately to prevent Domino's Pizza from being located
at Broadway & Prospect St.'s.

In City Council,

August 7, 1989

8-7-89

ORDER ADOPTED