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## Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Anova and Mary's Pizza Shack Partner in Launching a Sensory Friendly Restaurant Initiative**

*In honor of Autism Awareness Month, Anova and Mary's Pizza Shack are teaming up to help bring stress-free dining experiences to families living with autism and sensory processing disorders.*

**Santa Rosa, April 13, 2016** - In recognition of Autism Awareness Month, Anova and Mary's Pizza Shack announce they are partnering to launch an innovative pilot program to provide "Sensory Friendly Kits" allowing individuals with autism and other sensory needs the opportunity to enjoy dining without feeling overwhelmed by their surroundings. Mary's Pizza Shack is proud to be the first restaurant to join Anova on this important initiative. The Sensory Friendly Kits will be available starting April 22, 2016 at all eleven of their Sonoma County locations in Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Windsor, Sebastopol, Sonoma, Cloverdale, and Boyes Hot Springs.

Sensory sensitivity is a sign of autism and can affect every aspect of a person's life...including the ability to eat at a restaurant. With the rate of autism rising and currently affecting 1 in 68 children (1 in 42 boys), this initiative not only encourages inclusion in our community, it provides families with a place where they can enjoy a meal out knowing they have access to tools to aid in processing sensory stimuli, and the assurance that Anova has provided sensory training to the entire staff at all locations. The kits will be available upon request to use while dining, and include noise reduction ear muffs, a 3lb weighted lap pad, mini zone chart, and several different sensory toys to help promote a more calming environment.

Andrew Bailey, Co-founder of Anova said, "For Autism Awareness Month, we wanted to do something that would not only bring awareness, but help make a positive impact in our community. As a non-profit service provider of education and therapy to hundreds of children with autism, we witness so many families choosing not to dine out or enjoy many activities because of the overwhelming challenges involved. We want to turn that around by equipping restaurants such as Mary's Pizza Shack with tools that will help create a stress-free dining environment for those families in need. Mary's is the perfect partner to team with in developing this program. They are the quintessential family friendly restaurant and champions in our community."

Stefanie Bagala of Mary's Pizza Shack also commented, "At Mary's Pizza Shack, we are committed to providing an enjoyable and fun dining experience for all families. It's important to us that our guests with autism and sensory sensitivities know they have a place where they can enjoy delicious food yet also feel comfortable. We are beyond thrilled to be able to partner with an excellent organization such as Anova."

Although the pilot program will be introduced in Sonoma County, Anova and Mary's Pizza Shack are committed to working together with the help of feedback from customers to improve the Sensory Friendly Kits and expand it to other counties and businesses. They invite families living with autism and sensory processing disorders to please come in and try the kits, and help contribute to developing this important initiative within our community and beyond. If you have questions, or are a restaurant or business interested in becoming sensory friendly, please contact Jackie Hadley at 707-527-7032 or [jhadley@anovaeducation.org](mailto:jhadley@anovaeducation.org).

**About Anova**

Founded in 2000, Anova is Northern California's most trusted provider of education and behavioral therapy services for children and teens diagnosed with autism, learning differences, and other neuro-developmental impairments. Anova's three non-profit K-12 schools are located in Santa Rosa, San Rafael, and Concord, CA. They also provide behavior analysis, speech and language therapy, social cognition, occupational therapy, sensory integration and training, early intervention, paraprofessional support in public schools, and in-home services within 15 counties across California. Anova's unique program produces measurable and life changing results for children, their families, and the community. [www.anovaeducation.org](http://www.anovaeducation.org)

**About Mary's Pizza Shack**

Mary's Pizza Shack, founded in 1959 by Mary Fazio, is famous for its homemade Italian comfort food at reasonable prices served in a caring, passionate, casual and fun atmosphere. Since the opening of the first "shack" fifty-seven years ago, Mary's Pizza Shack has grown to 20 full-service casual Italian restaurants in Sonoma, Napa, Marin, Solano and Contra Costa Counties. Today, everything is still made from scratch using the original recipes from the original shack. Mary's Pizza Shack serves the same homemade pasta sauces, pizza, soups, salad dressings, and meatballs and carries on the same quality food, passion and traditions just like it was in 1959. Mary's Pizza Shack is a family owned business operated by the second and third generation of Mary Fazio located in Sonoma, California. [www.maryspizzashack.com](http://www.maryspizzashack.com)

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