

*in & around Bergenfield with*

# O. DIBELLA MUSIC

WRITTEN BY JORAM MUSHINSKE



**TEAMWORK** The current staff at O. DiBella Music (from left) Tom Mascarelli, Harry Muscariello, Margaret Dilling, Dan Sagi, Mike DiBella, Joe Pallo, Ernie Muhlback, Alex Esteban, Les Holtzapfel, Justin Decrescenzo and Jim Krazit; (below) Onofrio DiBella (left) is surrounded by sheet music, piano rolls and records at the Second Avenue, New York City, location of O. DiBella Music in the 1920s. Onofrio's grandson, Mike DiBella, still has the stools and cash register from this photo.

O DiBella Music is one of the oldest family-owned music retail businesses in the country. The company — originally started as a sheet music publisher — was founded by Mike DiBella's grandfather, Onofrio DiBella, in 1910, and was originally located on Second Avenue in New York City.

"In those years, there was very little sheet music in the United States that reminded the Italian immigrant community of what they were used to back in Italy," Mike says. "Onofrio, a mandolin player, saw this need and started writing and publishing music in the ballo liscio (lively dance) style."

The store moved to 116th Street in New York City in the 1920s, and the O. DiBella catalog quickly became part of the standard repertoire at Italian weddings, festivals and dances. "In the late 1930s, my father, Michael DiBella Sr., joined the business and started to sell musical instruments," Mike says. "Over the next eight decades, the business transitioned from



the original publishing company to a full-on retailer." Michael Sr. eventually moved the business again in 1968, this time to Bergenfield.

In the mid-1980s, Mike began to run O. DiBella with his brother, Anthony DiBella, and brother-in-law, Harry Muscariello. "We expanded our retail presence," Mike says. "In the fall of 1999, construction on our new 13,000 square foot showroom in Bergenfield was finished, and on Thanksgiving weekend we moved into that building, which is where we are today."

Mike credits much of their success to his extremely knowledgeable long-time employees. "The staff is always more than happy to answer questions about products or repairs," he says. "Customer service has always

been at the forefront of our business model. From our helpful guidance to a new musician to our unmatched in-house repair service, a customer always receives the time, information, and effort necessary to answer all their questions."

COURTESY OF MIKE DIBELLA





**HISTORY LESSON** Founder Onofrio DiBella (left) and his son, Michael DiBella Sr., at the 116th Street, New York City, location of O. DiBella Music in 1958. “This location was in an old New York City public school building near Lexington Avenue,” Mike DiBella says. “Onofrio purchased it from the Board of Education. The neighborhood was known as ‘Spanish Harlem’ and it was a vibrant neighborhood just a few blocks away from the Apollo Theater.” The store had great success in this location for many years before Michael Sr. — who had lived in New Jersey all of his life — decided to move the business to New Jersey in the late 1960s. “For 10 years after the move, people would come into the Bergenfield store asking, ‘Are you DiBella from Harlem?’ It turns out that they had moved to Jersey, too,” Mike says.

## WHY DO YOU LOVE BERGENFIELD?

“Bergenfield has become my home away from home,” Mike says. “In the 35 years that I have worked full time at O. DiBella, I have met countless customers from the entire New York metro area that I consider friends.”

## DINING

“Lunch is the meal we eat while at work,” he says. “Here are our regular spots in order of their distance from O. DiBella: **BROTHER’S PIZZA** (Bergenfield), **FOSTER VILLAGE KOSHER DELICATESSEN** (Bergenfield), **BERGENFIELD PIZZERIA** (Bergenfield), **DENARO’S SUBMARINE SANDWICHES** (Dumont), **ITALIAN CONNECTION PIZZA** (Dumont), and **BISCHOFF’S CONFECTIONERY** (Teaneck).”

## GIVING BACK

“O. DiBella is a constant and consistent supporter of school music programs and school stage plays,” Mike says.

## OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Once COVID-19 hit, O. DiBella switched to online music lessons due to safety concerns. “The biggest change since March 2020 is that we suspended our in-store, one-on-one private music lessons,” Mike says. “Many of my teachers successfully pivoted to teaching online, where they have found great success. To help them keep their schedules full, I lowered our half-hour private lesson fee to \$20 per lesson. I was grateful that I did not have to lay off any employees.”

After temporarily closing due to the pandemic, O. DiBella reopened its doors to walk-in customers in June. “We have CDC recommended protocols in place for our retail guests,” Mike says. “Justin, one of my managers, even invented a hand sanitizing station based on a drum set hi-hat stand.”

And since most of the area’s school music programs are strictly online now, teachers have been sending their string students to O. DiBella for simple tunings. “We appreciate that the local teachers used O. DiBella as their solution,” Mike says. “We love to help.” ■

*O. DiBella Music is located at 456 S. Washington Ave. in Bergenfield. Visit it online at [odibellamusic.com](http://odibellamusic.com), @odibellamusic on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, and dibellamusic on YouTube.*



**LOCAL FAVORITES** Mike DiBella shows off some of the inventory at O. DiBella Music, as well as dishes from a few of his local dining favorites, including (from left) Foster Village Kosher Delicatessen, Bischoff’s Confectionery and Denaro’s Submarine Sandwiches.