

Ask SCORE for Business Advice

“Ask SCORE” Column

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Column Title: Learning Business from Mom by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

Passion. Integrity. Courage. Loyalty.

These are just a few of the words that Valentina Nikolaides uses to describe her entrepreneurial mother, Angelina Cervantes of Angelina Restaurant in Green Bay. This Mother's Day weekend will give her an opportunity to celebrate these inspiring qualities that are part of her mom.

Cervantes left Italy in 1993 to marry her high school sweetheart, Sal, and to forge a better life in America. With her were her three children, Ermanno, Valentina, and Michael. They watched their mom as she started planning her first restaurant. In 1998, Angelina Restaurant opened in a small space on Washington Street.

“We all worked at the restaurant,” Nikolaides said. “Whatever had to be done – serving, washing dishes, preparation, and cooking. We gradually moved into every aspect of the business.”

Michael was 8-years-old at the time, Valentina was 15, and Ermanno was almost 20. They were inspired to see the long hours that their mother put in and felt proud of their role in the budding business. There were no vacations in those early years, but there were ample learning opportunities.

Nikolaides noted, “My mom taught all of us. She learned cooking from her mom and aunts in Italy where cooking is a big part of a woman's life. My mom has a gift of mixing simple ingredients and coming up with a new recipe. Nobody cooks like Angelina. Her innovation is beyond words.”

Now married, Nikolaides has a young son and is expecting a second child. She has worked at other restaurants and done well, but finds herself drawn back to Angelina where she is one of the managers. As the restaurant has grown (it was expanded into a new location at 117 N. Adams Street in 2004), so has family involvement. Sal, who remodeled the current location, is active in the business along with her mother, brothers, some other close relatives, and a few friends who are like family. Michael is currently attending a culinary school in California.

“It is never easy working with family, but there are greater payoffs. We are all working for something bigger,” Nikolaides remarked. “If we have a disagreement, we might yell for five minutes (after all, my mom is Sicilian), but then we laugh and it’s over.”

Angelina Restaurant is the family gathering place, and Nikolaides says that they do everything together. They are her support system; the people that she laughs and cries with. And, her mother is the heart of it all, continuously teaching by the way she lives her life.

“I have learned so many things from my mother,” she says. “I have learned from her strength, courage, work ethic, loyalty, and passion. She has taught me to never give up when things get hard, and that it takes hard work to get ahead. But even when the hours are long, it won’t seem like a sacrifice if you love what you do.”

If you’d like to learn more, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit www.greenbayscore.org or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

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