

Bellissimo
A Taste of Italy in Linden Woods
by
Brian Campbell

Starting out as a small family business with eight tables in 1999, Bellissimo Restaurant & Lounge has grown into an extremely popular place for people to go to celebrate a special occasion, a family gathering, or just a quiet dinner out with that special someone. Brothers-in-law, Greg Gagliardi and Greg Masi co-own the restaurant and although Greg Masi grew up in the restaurant business, they had never intended to own a restaurant themselves.

“We weren’t looking for a restaurant when we started,” Greg Masi said. “It just fell in our lap.”

“The opportunity presented itself and we took it,” Greg Gagliardi added.

“At the very beginning he (Greg Masi) was the one that ran the show,” Gagliardi said. “I had a full time job, so this was just a night time thing for me.”

But that soon changed. It wasn’t long before they relocated to a larger location in Linden Woods (2,500 square feet) and Greg Gagliardi began putting in more and more hours at the restaurant. Over the years, increased customers led to another expansion, until Bellissimo finally grew into the restaurant and lounge it is now.

Now they both have full time duties in the restaurant. “I’m all front end, he’s all back end,” Gagliardi said. “I handle customer service, reservations, restaurant staff; he handles the menus, kitchen staff, and anything related to the kitchen. There are also two head chefs, Cole Mospanchuk and Alex Nguyen-McNab, that work side by side under Greg.”

“That is one of the things that our regular customers notice,” Gagliardi added. “We are here a lot. We’ll sit down and have a glass of wine with them. The customers enjoy that they can come here and talk to the owners as friends.”

This arrangement has worked to make Bellissimo into a very successful restaurant with many loyal customers. “No matter what we do, it is number one,” Gagliardi said. “We are very well known for consistency. What we hear from our regular

customers is that the food is very good and always consistent and we have great serving staff. And this is what we strive for. Much of our staff has been here for years, so this is a career for them. They care about their job, they care about customer service.”

But Bellissimo is more than just the restaurant and lounge itself. They do catering; they also do pickup and delivery. They try to stay ahead of the trends, updating their website, getting involved with social media and doing what they can to make sure that they will be recognised by younger generations of potential customers.

But more than gaining recognition by new customers, it is very important to both Gregs that they stay true to their loyal customers. “The biggest part is keeping our customers happy,” Masi said. “And if for some reason they aren’t happy we want to know why and what we can do to make them happy. Winnipeg is a small city and people will talk. We want their talk to be positive. That’s a big part of being hands on. You get to know a lot more.”

“An important part of keeping customers happy is to serve great food,” Gagliardi added. “It’s important to buy high quality food products. We are not about competing with the cheaper pizza restaurants. We have our own products and our own customers.”

They also have a couple of very good wine experts working the front of the restaurant to help customers who are looking for that special bottle of wine. The two owners are very proud of the quality of their staff from the chefs to the servers, right down to the busing staff and dishwashers, and do what they can to keep them happy as well. “You have to make sure to keep your staff happy,” Gagliardi said. “You want to hold on to high quality staff who are doing a great job for you. In the service industry you want to have key staff.”

Both Gagliardi and Masi and their families live in the south end of the city, so they find it very convenient to have Bellissimo in Linden Woods, especially since they spend most of their time at the restaurant. “We make sure to spend quality time with our families,” Greg Gagliardi said. “Other than that, it is all about the restaurant.”

He adds, “We’re not like regular Italian restaurants, we’re a little off the regular path. It’s all the extra special stuff these guys do in the kitchen to create different styles of dishes that makes us stand out.”

You can find out more about Bellissimo by going to www.bellissimo-restaurant.com, check them out on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or just ask one of their many loyal customers.