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Bellevue bistro fits niche that Bassett envisioned

15-year restaurant industry veteran says having good business plan is key



Jill Bassett, right, turned her dream into reality when she opened Plae Bistro, 2615 Decuria Lane, Bellevue, about a year ago. Her sister, Kelly Cornelius, left, manages the restaurant.
The Business News photo by Eric Popp

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Since 2005, Jill Bassett had a detailed vision of her professional future. A vision that has had two concrete objectives: to be her own boss and to create a unique dining experience.

The steps she had to take to turn her vision into reality, according to Bassett, however, was no simple task.

Bassett, operator and owner of Plae (pronounced play) Bistro, said she “had a concept, idea, and dream. I knew I wanted to own my own business and that I wanted it to be a restaurant. However, I knew I needed something different, a niche, in order for it to work and be successful.”

The “niche” that Bassett created with Plae Bistro offers a little slice of life in addition to gourmet pizzas, a variety of entrees (headlined by pastas and steaks), an extensive wine and martini list, salads, and appetizers. Or, in the words of Bassett, “a fresh, new concept of American cuisine pairing imaginative food, wine, or martinis, with caring hospitality, comfortable surroundings, and exceptional value, while having the ‘big city’ feel.”

While Bassett is at the helm of Plae Bistro, her sister, Kelly Cornelius (each natives of Green Bay and graduates of Notre Dame Academy) manages it. Although still getting their feet wet in the restaurant world, each possess a marketing degree from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (Jill graduated in 1998; Kelly in 2004).

In addition to having her sister on board, Bassett also can count her parents as actively assisting in day-to-day operations at the restaurant.

“My parents,” said Bassett, a mother of two, “who are also investors in the company, are here helping out all the time. Whether it be hosting, bussing tables, or whatever else we might need at any time.”

In addition to having her own family at the restaurant, Bassett has proactively made an effort for customers to feel a part of the family as soon

Urban Hope

► This is one of a series of stories on people who have gone into business after training in the Urban Hope Entrepreneurial Program

as they walk through the door.

Customers (or guests as Bassett prefers to call them) are welcome to host a myriad of events at Plae Bistro. Whether it be a baby shower, anniversary dinner, or lunch with business associates, Bassett and her staff pride themselves on the steps they take to ensure that customers are indeed treated as guests.

Plae Bistro also offers a Build Your Own Bloody Mary Bar on Sunday mornings, and a manicure and choice of martini for \$18 on Monday evenings.

Bassett, a 15-year veteran of the restaurant industry, said a key to Plae’s success included finding a great staff to help execute her initial vision.

“One of the worries I had was finding a great staff,” Bassett said. “I already had Kelly lined up for managing, then I had to find my chef. Off the recommendation of a past co worker, I met Chef L.J. Weber. From our first meeting I knew he would be the perfect fit for us. Together, L.J., Kelly, and I have put in countless hours of recruiting, hiring, organizing, training, and managing. As a result, we have formed a great bond and, in my mind, an exceptional Bistro.”

Above all else, however, Bassett is quick to say that, “my dream would not be a reality without the management staff that I have along with all of the other employees who contribute to our success.”

Success that has come at a brisk pace.

While open a little less than a year, Plae Bistro has already been recognized by the community, being awarded the Business After Hours Peoples Choice Award for Best Appetizer at the 2007 Business Expo.

Not one to revel in accolades too long,

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There are people out there who have all these great ideas and want to start their own business. They find the perfect location, guess what their expenses will be, go to the bank to borrow the money, and a year down the line their business is closed due to not enough capital and too many expenses.

— Jill Bassett,
owner of Plae Bistro, Bellevue

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Bassett understands the steps that were taken to get to the this point — and the potential pitfalls it may not have avoided without a helping hand.

“I knew I needed a business plan before I could start this journey” Bassett said, “but I did not realize how much work actually went into it and all the areas that needed to be covered in order to have a successful business.”

Helping her dot her i’s and cross the t’s on her business plan was the Urban Hope Entrepreneur Center.

Located at the Business Assistance Center on the campus of Northeastern Wisconsin Technical College in Green Bay, the Urban Hope Entrepreneur Center (UHEC) offers courses so entrepreneurs can make their dreams and tentative business concepts a reality as well as show them how to survive and become a mainstay in their industry.

The experience of the course, and its effect on Plae Bistro, according to Bassett (who

enrolled in the course in winter 2006 with her sister, Kelly) are still felt to this day.

“All of my questions and concerns were addressed by the great speakers, staff, and my classmates,” Bassett said. “Urban Hope was the best decision I could have made for myself and for my business. Overall, my business would still be just a dream if I had not enrolled in the Urban Hope program and have the ongoing networking relationship with them.”

More importantly, in the mind of Bassett, was how the UHEC courses made her realize that preparation can only go so far without proper planning and insight.

“There are people out there who have all these great ideas and want to start their own business,” she said. “They find the perfect location, guess what their expenses will be, go to the bank to borrow the money, and a year down the line their business is closed due to not enough capital and too many expenses. There are so many expenses you do not realize unless you do all of your research and have a detailed business plan.”

As the doors of Plae Bistro opened in March 2007, so did word of mouth, which Bassett credits as her greatest source of business. “My guests are the best around,” Bassett said. “We have standing reservations with many of them on certain evenings, and they are my best advertisement.”

Bassett foresees an even greater influx of potential guests due to Plae Bistro’s location. “The night of my Urban Hope graduation, I was approached by a developer out of Milwaukee who was building the Millenium Lifestyle Center in Bellevue,” Bassett said. “He was given my name from Urban Hope Executive Director Mark Burwell who thought my concept would be a good fit with theirs.”

Not only is Plae Bistro surrounded by other small businesses, but a hotel is scheduled to open nearby in April.

When asked what she felt the future held for Plae Bistro, Bassett said, “I hope we can continue down this road.”