

New School

Modern marketing helped Marissa DeRosa Buckisch resurrect a family business

By Dustin Smith

Now that she's a highly decorated businesswoman, Marissa DeRosa Buckisch can relish the success she's helped bring to the family business. But it didn't come without a few of the sparks that occur when new age thinking meets with Old World tradition.

Buckisch, who earned a marketing degree from the University of La Verne in 1995, is a board member of the Irwindale Chamber of Commerce whose catering operation earned distinction as Business of the Year in 1999 and 2005 from the city. In 2003, she was named Business Woman of the Year by the Irwindale Chamber of Commerce.

She's also the daughter of Vincent and Maria DeRosa, who have proudly built Picasso's, a café/bakery/catering service, from the ground up. The "mom and pop" business was already a success when Marissa came along with her degree and new-fangled ideas.

"I had to earn their respect," said Buckisch, Executive Vice President of Marketing of the family-owned and operated restaurant in Irwindale. "I had to prove myself and earn their trust."

Before Buckisch joined the Picasso's team, there was no marketing department. Her father ran the store and her mother did the payroll. Now, 10 years later, Picasso's is more successful than ever, and Buckisch has been widely acknowledged for her contributions.

"Marissa is up on the trends," said Maria DeRosa, who admits she experienced the normal difficulty of handing over some of the decision-making to her daughter. "We had to find our niches and know where our talents were."



Seanette Garcia photo

Once Marissa DeRosa Buckisch ('95) sold her parents on modern marketing, their "mom and pop" cafe hit new heights, even after it was nearly destroyed by a car that crashed through it.

Within two years, Buckisch expanded Picasso's to bring in more customers and new opportunities. She enlarged the seating area, added wireless Internet, and persuaded Starbucks to launch one of its "We Proudly Brew" programs. Folks at Starbucks were skeptical. But once they saw the booming sales at Picasso's they decided the time had come for them to open their first store in that neighborhood.

Buckisch credits her parents with believing in her and having the faith to relinquish some of the business decisions to her. From there, she followed her instincts, gained experience and relied on her training in the University of La Verne's College of Business and Public Management.

"ULV is warm; you know it when you step on the campus," Buckisch said. "I am grateful to ULV, for shaping me, my belief system, morals, and the way I run my business."

All of her skills were tested in 2006 when tragedy struck Picasso's. A car crashed into the front side of the building, made its way through the café and parked in the bathroom. The front of the store was severely damaged, and the pipes in the bathroom burst, causing substantial water damage to the interior of the café.

But the vehicle did not destroy the kitchen, and Picasso's catering operation — which constitutes more than 75 percent of the business — was not affected. The tragedy actually enabled the family to

redesign the inside of the building.

The new black-and-white tile flooring brings a creative and modern feel that blends nicely with the Starbucks character in the café. While the tables and chairs from Italy were lost, Buckisch called on her creativity for options. Now, flat screen televisions are in the corners, adding a modern feel, but the old family feel of the place is still ingrained in its walls. When visitors enter, a coat rack signals that they may stay as long as they please.

Through the disaster, Picasso's continued to pay its employees. Instead of waiting tables, they set up canopies outside and offered coffee and pastries to customers who had not heard about the accident. They were proud to announce that no employee lost their job due to the accident.

"The accident created a bonding experience for our employees," said Leah Gutierrez, who DeRosa calls the "third lady in charge."

The resurrection of Picasso's is credited to the hard work of its employees. Buckisch, was recognized by the YWCA of the San Gabriel Valley as a "Woman of Achievement." She employed modern marketing techniques and an education from ULV, and blended them with a family spirit of cooperation and Old World determination.

"Picasso's has come back bigger, stronger, and better than ever," Buckisch said.