

A Family Affair

by Jené Drennan
Photos by Deb DeKoff

The restaurant industry

is a nonstop, demanding business that attracts a certain type of person — which is why it makes sense that so many eateries are operated by families with shared drive and passion. Not to mention the hours — it can be helpful to work on the same (often nighttime) schedule if you want to share any time off.



MINDFUL CUISINE
Linda and Larry Elbert



710 BODEGA, BUONA VITA
Paola Bello

THE BRICK, EL CHUBASCO, CRYSTAL PARK CANTINA AND BANGKOK THAI ON MAIN
Allan Galeano



350 MAIN & THE SPUR
Fabio Ferreira and Cortney Johanson

Take a closer look at countless establishments around Park City, and you'll discover a lot of family ties. Whether it's a husband-and-wife partnership (Tupelo Park City, Twisted Fern, Riverhorse on Main, Bartolo's, Silver Star Café, The Spur Bar & Grill and 350 Main) or a joint family venture (Hearth and Hill, 11Hauz, 501 On Main and others), many restaurant owners opt to share responsibilities with those they're related to.

The Couple That Works Together ...

Cortney Johanson started bussing tables as a teenager at her parents' restaurant, 350 Main, where she worked her way up to events coordinator and met her now-husband, Fabio Ferreira, when he worked there as a server. After some years passed, the pair reconnected, started dating and eventually took over 350 Main and The Spur together in 2013. "We started changing things in the direction we

thought it should be going," Johanson says. They did a ton of remodeling to give 350 Main a more modern vibe, revamped the entire menu with a new chef and expanded their other restaurant, The Spur, in the same year.

Now with a solid management team in place, the couple have the flexibility to see each other and their kids when they want to. Ferreira makes sure the restaurants have what they need to run smoothly (ordering liquor, dealing with



ALPINE DISTILLING
Rob and Sara
Sergent

PHOTO BY CLAIRE WILEY

sandwich-with-dips spot, and The Star Bar, an upscale cocktail lounge.

Supporting Players

Every star chef needs a support team to be successful. Such is the case for Linda Elbert of Mindful Cuisine and Deanna Fitchat of DeeLicious Park City, who both have family support to help things run smoothly in the kitchen.

Prior to moving to Utah to teach culinary classes, Elbert worked as a psychologist, and her husband, Larry, had a career as an engineer. When she realized she would need help with the business, he

gladly stepped up to pitch in with dishes and cleanup. He also assists with a lot of the hands-on grilling and outdoor cooking classes as well as dealing with the bookkeeping. “One of the reasons I wanted to build a space inside of our home was the flexibility of working when we wanted to work,” Linda says.

Fitchat offers everything from multi-course dinners to soup delivery through her private chef business. Her two sons grew up watching her in the kitchen, and once they hit high school, she started giving them small jobs to help with orders. That eventually evolved into bigger responsibilities, and now her youngest son, Michael, works for her full time while attending business school. “I think as mother and son the main benefit of working together

is that we’re both totally invested in each other’s goals,” Fitchat says. “We also know each other so well that if one of us is having an ‘off’ day, the other knows how to react so that it doesn’t affect our work and we are usually laughing after no time. I constantly try to remind myself to soak up this amazing time with my son because it’s such a gift.”

Family Ties

Hailing from a long line of Kentucky moonshiners and farmers, it’s no surprise that Rob Sergent made his way into the distilling business. Rob and his wife, Sara, who studied gin making in Scotland, own Alpine Distilling. They produce whiskey, gin and liqueurs that are available at their Silver Creek distillery, the Alpine Pie Bar on Main Street and liquor stores.

Family ties will always be important to the Sergents. The whiskey is crafted with corn, wheat, rye and barley that give a nod to Rob’s Kentucky lineage. The Lafayette Spiced Bourbon Whiskey was inspired by his great-grandmother, Granny Babe, who used to take ripe stone fruit from the farm and soak it in “shine” to add flavor.

Supporting the community is also a top priority for the couple, especially after they lost everything in Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when they lived in New Orleans. “It’s a really lovely balance to be able to do what we love ... in Park City as part of this great community,” Sara says. When COVID-19 hit, the Sergents pivoted to create tens of thousands of gallons of hand sanitizer for firefighters across the state. The award-winning Preserve Liqueur — a blend of blood orange, black tea, raspberry, lemon balm and ginger in a 100% corn base — was inspired by a sunset seen from the Swaner Preserve and EcoCenter, and a percentage of its sales goes back to the nature reserve. They’ve also worked with EATS, Recycle Utah and others.

Zane Holmquist is the corporate chef and vice president of food and beverage at Stein Eriksen Lodge. His family emigrated from Sweden in 1910 and kept a lot of their heritage — including his grandmother’s tradition of serving meatballs with potatoes and lingonberry jam at every special occasion. “I took it for granted as a kid until she passed away,” Holmquist says. “It’s just one of those quintessential things that’s so connected to my childhood. When you link in smell, aroma and taste with an activity, it becomes really engrained in your head.” The meatballs have now been on Stein’s menu for more than 15 years.

STEIN ERIKSEN LODGE’S ZANE HOLMQUIST’S SWEDISH MEATBALLS

FOR THE MEATBALLS:

2 POUNDS GROUND PORK
1 POUND GROUND VEAL
1/2 YELLOW ONION, FINELY DICED
10 SPRIGS OF PARSLEY, STEMS REMOVED
2 OUNCES UTAH HONEY
KOSHER SALT AND PEPPER, TO TASTE
2 EGGS
1/4 CUP PANKO BREAD CRUMBS

> Combine all ingredients together, mix thoroughly and

place in refrigerator to rest overnight.

Roll mixture into 1-inch uniform meatballs. Place meatballs, evenly spaced, on a nonstick sheet pan.

Cook at 300 F for 8-10 minutes. Remove from oven and place in lingonberry sauce.

FOR THE LINGONBERRY SAUCE:

8 OUNCES LINGONBERRY JAM
3 CUPS VEAL DEMI GLAZE (CAN BE FOUND IN SPECIALTY FOOD STORES)
3/4 CUP HEAVY CREAM

> Combine all ingredients, simmer and reduce until sauce has a nappe consistency.



SHABU
Kevin and Bob
Valaika



PHOTO BY CAROLINE HARGRAVES

worked as a manager and head hostess, the Valaikas have been through a lot — including a recession and a pandemic. “One of the biggest benefits of working together is that a partnership is complicated, but because we’re family we have to work it out,” Kevin says. “We’ve had our differences in opinion, but when you have a wife, brother and a father all in it — you work it out.”

There have been heated moments between restaurateur Allan Galeano and his sister, Paola Bello, but the pair always support each other. “I once threw a plate of spaghetti and meatballs at her when she was driving me crazy,”

Galeano says. “But we love each other a lot. She’s very feisty, and so am I.”

The siblings were born in Uruguay to an Italian father and a German mother and spent time in Italy, Germany and New York before they opened their first restaurant — Buona Vita in Hermosa Beach, California — 30 years ago. They brought Buona Vita Ristorante Italiano to Park City together in 1998.

Bello continues to operate Buona Vita and 710 Bodega on Main with her husband, Nick, and Galeano owns The Brick, El Chubasco, Crystal Park Cantina and Bangkok Thai on Main. “Somebody once told me if you’re making money, there aren’t any problems,” Galeano says. “As siblings, you cover each other’s asses.”

Continuing a Legacy

It’s truly all in the family at the Dairy Keen in Heber City, where a third generation of siblings run the business that their grandparents started in 1946. Known for its thick shakes, Train Burgers and fries, Dairy Keen continues to be a staple of the community thanks to sibling owners Jan Olpin, Mike Mawhinney and Kim Houtz. Olpin handles the accounting, Mawhinney does the scheduling and Houtz does the training — “but if something needs to be done, one of us does it,” Olpin says. “There are no jobs that are beneath you or above you.”

A lot has happened throughout the 75 years of Dairy Keen’s existence, including a complete redo of the entire building after 13 remodels. The family has grown up with and literally in the business. “My sister had eight children,” Olpin says. “Every time she would come home with a baby, she would lay the baby in the sink and go to work. Every one of her children has slept in the sink.” The kids were taught how to peel potatoes and wipe down tables as young as 4 years old. “You start young when it’s yours,” she says.

The siblings have had to work through difficult times, including the loss of their parents eight and 10 years ago. “We are there for each other always and through everything — through thick and thin,” Olpin says. Before their father died of colon cancer, he made it very clear that “we weren’t to make a big fuss and we should only be closed the minimum amount.” Naturally the siblings took a day to pay respects to their father and closed the restaurant, but “we still laugh that we needed to get to work or Dad would be mad that we were slacking.”

Sibling Revelry

Going into business with your sibling(s) can be trying at times, but it’s always worth it, as Shabu’s Kevin Valaika can attest. Valaika and his twin brother, Bob, developed complementary skills throughout their careers. Bob trained under acclaimed Japanese chef Nobuyuki “Nobu” Matsuhisa, while Kevin mastered front-of-the-house skills working at Bill White properties and Robert Redford’s former restaurant, Zoom. Together they started Park City Private Chefs, a high-end catering business, before venturing into what is now the Asian fusion restaurant Shabu in 2004.

Along with their dad, who has helped with accounting, and Kevin’s wife, Heidi, who has



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