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**Epicurean Group CEO
LARRY DIPASQUALE**

Children's
Museum

Uncorked
Kitchen

Women+Film

Epicurean Group CEO

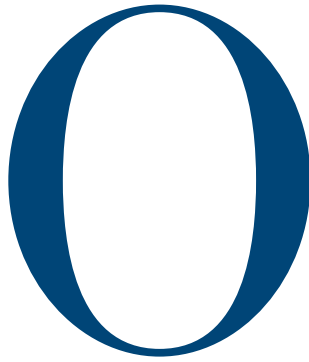
Larry DiPasquale

Larry DiPasquale is a local and national catering phenomenon. More than 30 years ago he purchased a small catering company, bucked trends, set new standards and garnered dozens of awards along the way. He is the master of catering and hospitality. Today, Epicurean Group is a multi-division company serving more than one million people annually. Larry credits his wife Jill for fulfilling his dreams. “When you’re all about hospitality, you have to have that strength at home.” ¶ Born and raised in Glendale, California, his heritage is rooted with Italian traditions. “I look at a lot of my culinary journey and know it is from my Italian grandmother who held the family together for Sunday meals. It was an all day event and my grandmother never taught you how to cook—she showed you how it was done.” Even at a young age DiPasquale was an attentive listener and absorbed advice from employers while working his teen years in a pizzeria and as a young adult in a five-star hotel/restaurant in Harrah’s Lake Tahoe. ¶ His entrepreneurial father and tax accountant father-in-law solidified business ethics. To be successful, DiPasquale’s father advised him to put in time and his father-in-law provided financial guidance. “The old Italian saying is if you have a nickel going out you better have a dime coming in,” relays DiPasquale. While working as a teenage Italian pizza chef he recalls, “When I interpreted a recipe the way I wanted to do it, the owner literally pulled me out of the restaurant by my ear and asked me to read the sign outside. When I said Beppe’s Wood Fired, he said, ‘exactly. Does it say Larry DiPasquale’s Pizzeria? When you’re in my building you do things the way I want.’ That stuck with me.”



By KATHY SMITH





f Harrah's he says, "As much as I was trained as a chef and a wine steward, I found my true calling was in the front of the house. I met Mr. Hospitality in Bill Harrah who was all about the customer experience." ¶ From his early days at

Harrah's to today, hospitality for DiPasquale consists of a pecking order of three essential components. "The way I run my business, which I learned very young, would be your team of employees come first, then your clients and then your vendor partners."

We don't just set the table, we set the standard

In 1981, he left his executive position at Harrah's and took a ground level job at Four Seasons/Epicurean Enterprise catering company to learn the business. "Mike Wolf and I bought out the other investors in 1985 with the understanding that I would buy out Mike in the early 1990s. That happened and Mike, along with Richard Rizzo, Dan Spahr and David Alexander helped me grow the business," he says.

Epicurean Culinary Group was formed and a major shift in the catering industry followed. DiPasquale says, "I really had a vision to do catering different than the way it was done. The caterers made everything in commissaries, transported the food and warmed it up on site. I wanted to make everything fresh on site." Preparing food on site—often in a client's garage—was ground breaking for the industry. It was also financially challenging as DiPasquale now had capital expenses with on-site ovens and equipment. For every event they had to build a kitchen. "It was a huge challenge back then and it is the way catering is done today, but I know that I was instrumental in making that change. This was a huge explosion for our company with chefs on-site and that really took off." DiPasquale's business philosophy relies on setting a platform for his employees to realize their dreams. "What I preach is that

with the competitive nature of the hospitality industry, we constantly have to want to improve. People come back time in and time out—I like to say for seconds and thirds—and they tell me they come back not just for me but because everyone they meet at Epicurean has this enthusiasm," he reflects.

"Being Larry DiPasquale's assistant for the past 17 years, I have seen many changes in our industry but he has always remained the same—passionate about our employees, our clients and our product," shares Colleen Lagomarsino. "My mentors when I first started here were Sharon and Bob Magness. They would give small business owners like me an opportunity to do some incredible events like Western Fantasy. Sixteen years ago after Bob had already passed away, Sharon invested in the company. Her husband Ernie Blake is now part of the family too," says DiPasquale. "The Jewish community embraced me and I embraced them and to this day I consider a lot of them the reason I'm still in business. They broke away from a traditional competitor and gave me an opportunity."

A turning point in DiPasquale's career came in 1994 when the chamber of commerce bestowed the Small Business of the Year award to Epicurean. "My philosophy on success is that success is when all of your hard work gets acknowledged. We're only as good as our last meal served, make it the best!" This has been the motto for the Epicurean staff and is posted in every kitchen."

President and COO Greg Karl says, "Larry always reminds us of the important role we play in our client's most memorable life moments. We take that responsibility seriously and enjoy it every day."

Ten years ago, DiPasquale built a 28,000 square foot facility including a reception area with observation windows peering into the massive kitchen, bakery, storage and tasting rooms, offices and a solar car port, which produces power for Bella Cucina Giardino—a private multi-use reception terrace. Epicurean recently received the Gold Standard Award for the facility. Often, successful businesses experience a revolving door with employees. "What I have found is a lot of people that are currently in top management roles here worked for us years ago, left the company and have come back and now applied what they've learned other places along with what we've taught them and taken our company to new heights," describes DiPasquale. He adds, "As an entrepreneur you have to surround yourself

UPPER LEFT: GREG KARL, PRESIDENT; PAUL AYLMEYER, VICE PRESIDENT/CFD; AND LARRY DIPASQUALE AT THE TEACHING GARDEN THAT WAS ENDOWED BY THE DIPASQUALE FAMILY. UPPER RIGHT: COLLEEN LAGOMARSINO, ASSISTANT TO LARRY FOR 17 YEARS; LARRY DIPASQUALE. LOWER: THE EPICUREAN TEAM CELEBRATING AFTER LARRY'S INDUCTION TO THE VISIT DENVER HALL OF FAME.



with people that are as passionate as you are but have way more expertise. You have to always be challenging yourself and them to be better.”

Feeding more than one million people annually contributes to repurposing food that has been produced but not used. DiPasquale is on the board of We Don't Waste and says, “We have repurposed more than 100,000 servings every year.” A food truck goes out every other week to the Volunteers of America Mission and serves 400 to 700 people in-need. DiPasquale has a division in his company called Epicurean Cares that provides quality food to those in need. He explains, “I was really influenced by Noel Cunningham who encouraged me to get involved. It's part of our responsibility and honor to take quality products to serve people .”

“There are speed bumps. With our current executive leadership team of President Greg Karl and Vice President Paul Aylmer everyone knows we pride ourselves in doing the right thing and that means if something wasn't the way it needed to be, then it needs to be handled in the right way,” assures DiPasquale. “You have to be a tough business-minded person so my rule there is that superior hospitality and quality and taking care of the people who take care of our guests is a winning combination.”


When DiPasquale first started, he was operating out of a 900 square foot garage and was surprised and thrilled when Epicurean received the contract for the Denver Broncos. “John Beake is the one who started me off with the Broncos and he has been a mentor. He said, ‘I'm going to give you this opportunity in these new suites and we'll see how you do.’ The one thing about the Broncos, they're a client that is all about their fans having the best experience and it is a cherished partnership.” Epicurean held the contract for 11 years for the 40 suites and won the contract for the new stadium 15 years ago. “To this day, the challenge is to be the best in the game.”

“I am the most grateful to my wife, Jill. I can't ever remember in 34 years a time when I would get home from an event, when, even if she was asleep, she wouldn't ask me how every-



LARRY AND JILL DIPASQUALE

thing went. We have the same business philosophies that are similar to Sharon's and we have the same compassions for people. In 2005 Jill, Sharon and I formed the DiPasquale Family Foundation, which contributes to the educational needs of culinary, food service and entrepreneur students, primarily from Johnson & Wales University,” states DiPasquale. He was recently awarded an honorary Doctor of Business Administration in Food Service Entrepreneurship from Johnson & Wales University. He says, “One of the things with awards is when you get recognized it's a huge responsibility to be that and then live up to it.”

DiPasquale is enjoying teaching and mentoring students and taking an occasional vacation. “I feel very confident that the people who have made this their career and believe in Epicurean with the leadership in executive, culinary and sales that is second to none, can run the company when I'm away. My dreams are realized and my goal is to make sure their dreams come to fruition.” 

Kathy Smith is a freelance writer and editor who has been published in many local Denver magazines and who writes frequently for the New West Publishing family of magazines.

