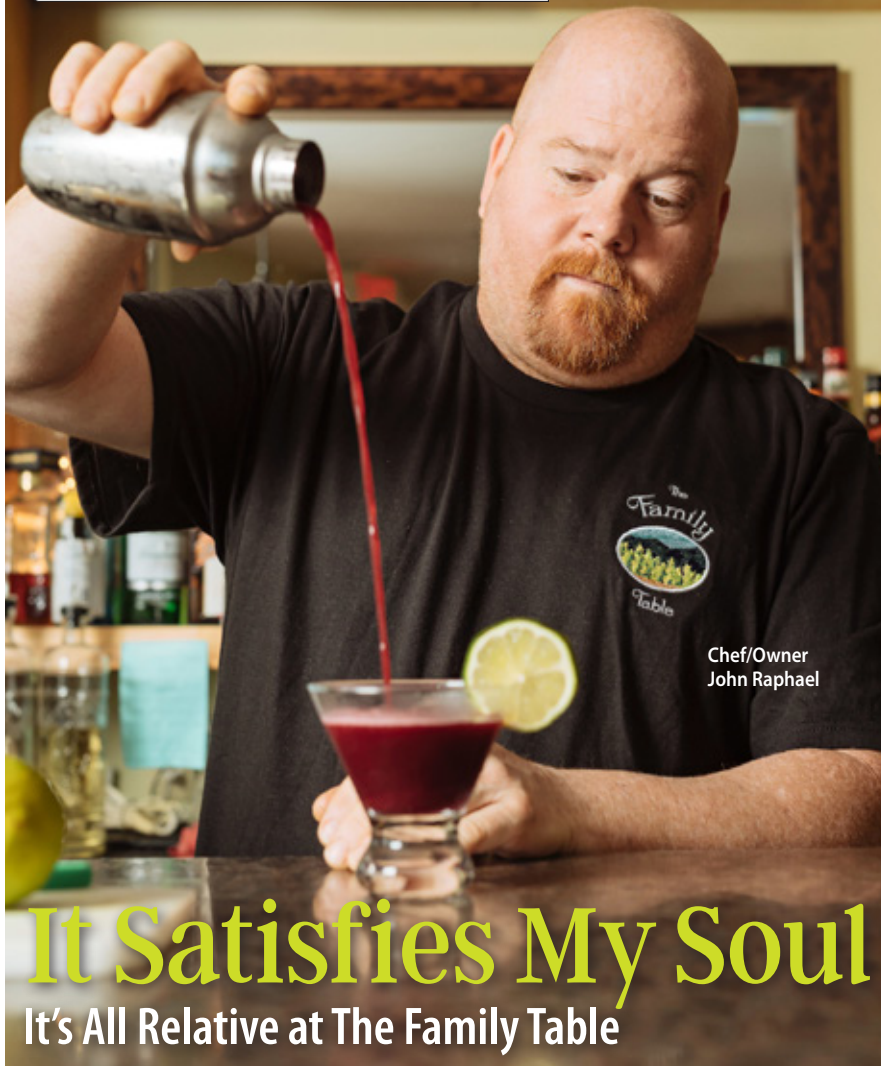


## BEHIND THE BAR



Chef/Owner  
John Raphael

# It Satisfies My Soul

## It's All Relative at The Family Table

**J**ohn Raphael has been involved in the restaurant business for almost as long as he can remember.

The chef/owner of The Family Table, in Jeffersonville, recalls standing on a chair and helping his parents prep food for their catering business as a young child. So after attending Champlain College and then the prestigious Johnson and Wales University, in Rhode Island, he made it his career.

When it came time for him to open his own restaurant, there was no question about where it would be.

"This is my favorite part of the state," he says of his restaurant's home. "This was perfect. It's a beautiful area, I really like it, so I decided to live here."

The Family Table, which opened in 2010, offers a menu that ranges from lobster tiger rolls with a sweet chili ginger dipping sauce and maple pork chops to a 30-day dry-aged

grilled rib eye and a lamb burger with tzatziki, feta and roasted red peppers. A new cocktail menu has upped the offerings from the restaurant's bar, as well.

"We used to do seven percent liquor," Raphael says. "Now we've come out with a nice, new drink menu with fancier drinks, that's up to 20 percent."

It all comes from the imagination of a chef with years of diverse experience in a wide variety of establishments. But like the name of the restaurant would suggest, for Raphael, it all comes down to the personal connection with his guests.

"Customers and fun people know they can eat at the bar and interact with me and the wait staff," he says. "They know it'll be fun and we can talk and socialize with everyone hanging out there. It's like 'Cheers,' everyone knows your name.

"It's really not about making money off of one visit. It's about relationships with customers — a lifetime relationship. You're involved

in their weddings, bar-mitzvahs, family events, funerals. It's nice to be chosen for those situations. I really try to develop relationships with everyone who comes through the door."

### What's the philosophy of your bar program?

"We only have high end spirits. It's a nice, clean bar with a nice tap system. We make good drinks. We don't sell a ton of liquor, but we want to give somebody a good quality drink so they can enjoy it and have it with their food.

"It's about having a high quality experience from food to drink to interaction with everybody. We support local as much as can. We use Jeremy (Elliot's) stuff from Smuggler's Notch whenever we can. It's about high quality beverages that people like."

### Share a Behind the Bar secret.

"Listen. It's all about being a therapist. I just had that conversation with good customer. At the end of the night he shook my hand and said, 'thanks for listening — this was a great therapy session.' You need to evolve that relationship so they trust you and want to talk to you. If they're stressed, that's why they're there — to have a drink and escape the every day stuff. You need to be open to that and be attentive. Give them that extra attention. It's all about the relationship. You should engage everybody and smile all time. If don't have it, run next door. A customer came in and wanted a Moscow Mule. I had to tell him I had no ginger beer, so I ran next door, got some and made the drink. You should make people feel like they're family."

### What do you like most about your job?

"I like seeing people enjoy what I do and keep them coming back for more. When that hap-



Written by Bill Burke | Photography by Oliver Parini



### Blueberry/Raspberry Martini

- 4 ounces house blueberry/raspberry vodka
- 2 teaspoons blueberry purée
- ½ teaspoon simple syrup
- ½ teaspoon fresh lime juice
- Lime for garnish

Chill a martini glass and set aside. Combine ingredients in a shaker with ice. Shake, strain and serve in the chilled martini glass with a lime garnish.

pens, it just says that I've chosen the right path. It satisfies my soul to know I'm feeding people and making them happy. The most important decisions in life are made by families around a dinner table. Kings and presidents eat around a table, enjoy a feast and talk. Eating is an important part of life. A lot of things come about from a good meal and a good discussion."

### At the end of a shift, I...

"I clean. Everybody's got to clean everything, so I end up breaking everything down and then doing paperwork. It's a clean-fest, really. It takes a couple hours to clean and make everything perfect for the next day. I work constantly, but when I want to unwind the TV works for me — but nine out of 10 times I fall asleep before the lion roars before the first scene of the movie."

### What advice would you give aspiring bartenders?

"Make good drinks and listen. Make the drinks the way you're supposed to. Drinks were invented a certain way to taste a certain way, so make them properly. That's so important. If you over-pour, you'll ruin the flavor. Mixology is a science like baking and cooking. The portions are made for a certain reason to achieve a certain taste. If you keep it to that, people will enjoy it more and come back for another taste. It'll be so good they remember it." ☒

### The Family Table

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**USING A HANDHELD CELL PHONE WHILE DRIVING IN VERMONT IS ILLEGAL.**

