

## BEHIND THE BAR



# Lago Trattoria: Family First

Many restaurants claim to be family-focused. At Lago Trattoria, in Newport, it's not just a marketing slogan.

**S**andy Richardi is the bartender and some-time chef at the well-known Italian eatery. Her brother, Frank, is the owner. They're joined by her husband, her sister-in-law, her niece, her daughter and her son. And visitors can expect to see her parents stop by on a daily basis. According to the mixologist, it's just something in the Richardi DNA.

"Our family grew up in the restaurant business," she says during a break at Lago Trattoria's spacious, comfortable bar. "My grandparents

were one of the first submarine shops in the country back in the early 60s."

The Richardis are originally from the Braintree area in Massachusetts. A quick conversation with the loquacious bartender reveals a heavy regional accent, and, despite her love of the Vermont north country, a strong connection to the Bay State and Boston's professional sports teams. The drink menu features cocktails called We're Going to Need a Bigger Boat (an ode to "Jaws"), the Big Papi (a nod to the Red

Sox' David Ortiz), The Green Monster (named for Fenway Park,) and the Number 4 (in honor of Bruins legend Bobby Orr.) The choices are creative, and sometimes elicit some good-natured ribbing from friends and customers visiting from just across the nearby Canadian border.

"We get half Bruins fans and half Canadiens fans," Richardi says, laughing. "It's so funny, because we just got in some Coors Light glasses with the Bruins logo on them. We have some

Written by Bill Burke | Photography by Matthew Thorsen



Siblings Frank and Sandy Richardi

Canadiens fans that come in and I love giving them those Bruins glasses. They'll yell to Frank in the kitchen, 'Why do you do this to us?'"

Keeping things light is important for the outgoing Richardi. Quite often, the focus comes down to ensuring customers are having fun. And that, she says, creates loyal customers.

"One of our regular customers is Donald Sutherland," Richardi says. "He loves this restaurant. It's great – he lives right across border, but when he calls, he knows Frank's voice and name and he knows my voice and name, and he'll ask, 'Does Frank have lamb on?' I'm coming in. It's not so much who he is, but that he actually remembers everyone and respects everyone and keeps coming back. When you have somebody who is a farmer who keeps coming back, it's great. But when you have someone like that who is also a regular, that's fantastic, too. Doesn't matter what you do, it's just that this is where they come."

### What cocktail is Lago Trattoria best known for?

**Sandy Ricardi:** We have a lot of cocktails, but I have to say that the biggest and longest selling martini is our Mangotini. It's just called a Mangotini – no frills, no Boston connections,

no nothing. I think it's the fresh mango. People know that everything Frank does here is fresh – from his pasta to his raspberry purees to chocolate sauces to desserts. When it says mango puree, they know they're not getting cheap mango juice. Frank processes his own mango puree. Besides, who doesn't like a mango?

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

**SD:** For me, it's all about great food, fantastic drinks and you've got to be having fun. Just having fun and not feeling like you're an outsider. I have people that I know that are up here visiting, and some of my regulars are at the bar, and I want them all to feel at home. So I introduce them to the locals, and now they're locals. I enjoy introducing new people to old people. I have local real estate agents who have now sold to some of my new people. I try to make it where it's kind of like 'Cheers' – everybody knows your name. That's exactly what it's like.

### Share a behind the bar secret.

**SD:** You have to be able to read your customers. When I've trained people or taught people over the years, I can tell within two days

whether or not they're going to make it. It's all about reading people. That's why I'm more comfortable working behind the bar – I know when I have to watch my mouth, or when I can act a certain way, or I know when I can have loads of fun and crank music up. That is a bartending secret – really being able to read your customers.

### What's the most unusual request you've gotten?

**SD:** Since we're right up on the Canadian border – I know it's not completely unusual – but lot of people ask for clamato juice. People will come in and say, 'Sandy can you make me fruity drink or rum runner or one of the signature martinis.' The only unusual thing I tend to get is people asking for clamato – clam and tomato juice.

### What makes a perfect night at work?

**SD:** A perfect night is when new customers meet old customers and as a result, everybody has fun. You don't get as uptight if you're having so much fun with everybody. And it rubs off on your customers. If they're having fun, they're going to come back. I enjoy having fun and not feeling like I'm at work. Even though you can't drink, you're enjoying their company and having so much fun that it's like being out and having cocktails with them. ☺



### Mangorita

Courtesy Lago Trattoria

- 2 ounces Tito's Handmade Vodka
- 1½ tablespoons fresh mango puree
- Pineapple juice
- Orange juice
- Cranberry juice
- Grenadine
- Orange wedge, for garnish

Combine the vodka, mango puree and equal parts pineapple, orange and cranberry juice, and add a dash of grenadine. Shake it so it's frothy, pour into a martini glass with a sugared rim and serve.