

# ERICA RUSSO:

## RESTAURANT MANAGER AND MOM TO MANY

By Doug Mace

**E**rica's parents, forty-year veterans and restaurant owners, started her early in restaurants and she grew up involved behind the scenes and eventually on the front lines. During school at Community College of Baltimore County in Towson, she was already managing bars and working at a variety of bars and restaurants around Baltimore.

After graduating she did what most do and tried to find a stable desk job. Working in finance for an advertising firm was that

job, but that wasn't for her.

"I was just bored. You go from the restaurant industry to a nine-to-five office job. It's a big difference."

At the corner of Thames and Anne streets, on a cold day in 2010, Erica saw the potential of a small brick and stone building, and realized she had found her spot to make a change. Back to the business she came from; The Point in Fells was born.



As Owner/Operator, Erica constantly works true restaurateur hours, often doubling as a bartender. The close knit operation and her own approach helped encourage other generations to join the endeavor.

Both Erica's son and daughter are part-time employees who worked their way up from busser and hostess. Her mother is Executive Brunch Chef and her Father does finances and other work throughout the restaurant. Even her boyfriend of five years will be taking over as a managing partner in their next venture.

Direct relatives aren't the only people Erica considers family at The Point. Most of the staff has been with her for over three years indicating The Point operates as a well-oiled machine with a low turnover rate.

"I treat everyone like family; good or bad." Erica explained, "I'm stern, but also very accepting of things that they have going on in their personal life."

But it's not all business and criticism. Another way she acts as a leader and Mother to her work family: field trips. About twice

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a year she sets up an event for the staff – escape rooms and trips to breweries – to go out and have fun. Also to learn about the industry, and each other.

The hands-on approach to teaching the family, and to always keep it fun, is part of why she realizes there's more to life than just work.

"When they request off, I try to honor it. When I need to I fill in for them, I do. They see me doing the same exact thing they're doing ... I would never ask my employees to do something I wouldn't do myself."

An example of how Erica's staff is her family comes from her head bartender, Richard August, and his experiences over the last five years of working for her.

After losing his father to ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) Erica took the liberty of setting up multiple fundraisers each year to fund research for the disease.

She reiterated why taking care of a grieving member of the team was so important. "I think the key to have employee longevity is simply treating them how you would want to be treated."

Even as recently as this year, one of the members of her staff was hit by a car in Fells Point and the family rallied. Donating all of their tips for an evening, her team threw a fundraiser to help assist with her medical bills.

Only in the last year or two did Erica move out from behind the

bar and forward with her new project. Later this year she plans to open The Point in Towson, which will cater to that area just as The Point in Fells caters to its waterfront location.

The point serves American comfort food, with a twist, including vegan and gluten free options. About half of the original location's menu will travel north, but the remaining half will be comprised of slightly different, but equally eclectic items.

Whether being Mom to both families, opening a new restaurant, or beginning a new philanthropic adventure, Erica always moves herself toward improving her life and the experiences of those around her. ■

**Something About You:**

"I used to break dance. I love to dance. No one really knows that about me."

**One Person You Would Most Like to Serve:**

"Edgar Allen Poe, I'm fascinated by him and the background and the back story of him in Maryland."

**Book You're Reading Now:**

"The only book I'm reading right now is a list of how to open a restaurant."

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