

GRANDPA PIZZI'S PLACE

“Synchronicity”, per Taylor Hill and Karen Wheeler, is what led them to a local sheriff sale in Conneaut.

Taylor, a gifted artist, was looking to potentially set up a small gift shop which showcased her talents of handmade postcards, t-shirts and other items. That idea led her to Anita Stocker and the Small Business Development Center at Lakeland Community College. Anita was impressed with Taylor’s well thought out plan and future ideas. But it was “synchronicity” that took Taylor’s idea to a whole other level.



Back in 1934, Taylor’s great-grandfather opened Pizzi’s Cafe, a local pizza shop and beer garden in Conneaut, just a short walk down the street from the beaches of Lake Erie. After changing hands a few times over the last 90 years, Taylor’s mom, Karen heard that the building was coming up for auction at the local Sheriff’s Sale. Curious to see how the old building looked, take one last trip down memory lane and watch the outcome of the sale - Karen brought Taylor to the auction. “When we went to the Sheriff Sale, the last thing we thought about was buying the building. But when we left, we were the owners!”, Karen said. Taylor agreed as to how amazed they were at their purchase. “A lot of the *brand* is in the history behind it. We didn’t want anyone to just buy it and slap a coat of paint on it.”

“With the Pizzi name and brand, we decided to go to the full extent out of respect to my great- grandfather and make it work.”

Sidestepping from her original business model, Taylor reconnected with Anita Stocker and the SBDC to develop a new plan. Anita, being a former restaurant owner herself, provided a series of questions for Taylor and Karen to ponder, making sure this was the direction they really wanted to go. She assisted them in setting up an order of approach to take and pointed to the resources they would need to get there. “It was so daunting at first with all of the places you have to contact and things you have to do... obtain EIN and state liquor license, contact the local departments for inspections...the list goes on.” But Taylor did not let anything bring her down, as she was all in to make this a success.

It was a long process, both mentally and physically exhausting, as each piece of furniture in the building was either rehabilitated from the original or purchased locally in the community. “We wanted to keep the original feel of the place, but with a face-lift”. “It takes a village”, Karen said. “Community members chipped in to help, including the local football team who assisted by unloading sheets of drywall and bringing them into the building. “That in itself was a HUGE help!”

A year later, the revitalized cafe still had the original bar, which Taylor painstakingly restored by hand and the older, large, framed photos as homage to her great-grandparents. A video, created by Karen, repeating a loop of photos from years gone by which runs continually on one of the television monitors. “It was emotional for me, watching the video. But I was amazed to see how much it touched the hearts of some of the older folks who stopped in to reminisce. Tears streamed down their faces, as they watched the scrolling of old photos of friends and loved ones who have since passed on.” Looking back at it all, it is amazing to think how far we have come.” said Taylor. It was overwhelming at times, but we are starting to come out of the bubble.”

With its original Italian recipes and some new upscale menu options, Grandpa Pizzi’s Place has enjoyed the return of old clientele as well as new faces. Growing quickly, Taylor and her family had purchased the lot next door to build their garden of farm to table vegetables and ability to expand further. With a newly renovated upstairs, Grandpa Pizzi’s Place offers private rental options, live music and holds their own events each month, donating proceeds back to the community.

“I love being a part of cool history and helping different local businesses.” Said Taylor. To other businesses out there, she adds. “Time is valuable. You don’t need to be defeated. There were so many things we did not know, so we had to learn everything. Anita and the SBDC steered us in the right direction, answered all our questions and pointed to other resources that we needed.”

You never know how Synchronicity may work for you.

