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Woman Entrepreneur of the Year

LISA SCHROEDER

MOTHER'S BISTRO & BAR/MAMA MIA TRATTORIA

BY JODI HELMER Special to The Business Journal

Lisa Schroeder spends all day slaving over a hot stove making comfort foods like meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and macaroni and cheese. When the dishes emerge from the oven Schroeder heads to the dining room to serve them to her extended family: the customers who gather at Mother's Bistro & Bar for a taste of the foods mom used to make.

Schroeder had the idea to open a restaurant that served motherly food to the masses more than a decade ago when she was spending her days working as the marketing manager for a large corporation and her nights running a catering company.

"Like every working mother, I would get takeout food — Chinese, Mexican, Italian, Thai — but what I really wanted was mother food like pot roast and mashed potatoes with gravy," Schroeder says. "I wanted a place to get comfort food but none existed."

Schroeder nurtured the idea for years but it was not until she was laid off in 1993 that she set her plan in motion. She enrolled in the Culinary Institute of America in New York and then spent several years working in some of the top restaurants in the country, learning everything she could about running her own restaurant.

Eight years ago Schroeder moved to Portland and knew immediately that it was the right place to open her restaurant.

"There was no place in Portland where you could order mother food," Schroeder recalls. "I knew I could fill a niche in the culinary world that was not being filled by anyone else."

Five years ago Schroeder signed a lease on a space in the heart of downtown Portland and she has never looked back.

"We opened the doors on our very first day and 91 people walked in for lunch," says Schroeder, noting that today she serves approximately 500 meals on a typical Sunday.

Like any good mother, Schroeder is always ready to jump in and lend a helping hand. On any given day she can be found whipping up dishes in the kitchen, refilling water glasses, taking orders, serving meals and chatting with her customers.

"Every single thing has to be perfect — from the atmosphere and the way the food tastes to the way it looks on the plate," Schroeder says. "I am totally devoted to making sure that every one of my customers has a wonderful experience."

"[Lisa] really cares about each and every person that walks through the door; she cares about their experience, their service and the quality of their food," says Sierra Bury, the manager of Mother's Bistro & Bar. "She is one of those special people who have the ability to conceptualize an idea and make it into reality."

Last year, Schroeder successfully turned another vision into reality: Mama Mia Trattoria, a neighborhood eatery serving homemade Italian food.



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"I realized there was no place to get East Coast Italian food like chicken parmesan and veal marsala in Portland. It was another hole in the culinary market and I decided to fill it," Schroeder says. "I am not trying to be the next gastronome; I just wanted to open a restaurant where people could find simple Italian food."

Mama Mia Trattoria opened its doors in August only a block away from Mother's Bistro & Bar and the concept was a hit with diners.

"Mama Mia was a success from the get-go," Schroeder says. "I am successful because I have worked for it, not because it has been given to me. Nothing has been handed to me on a silver platter; I have worked very hard. I guess the hard work has paid off."

When Schroeder is not whipping up a meatloaf or a batch of pierogi, she is using her culinary talents to support the community. In addition to being a strong supporter of the Bradley-Angle House, Schroeder also teaches cooking classes for Morrison Child and Family Services and serves on the board of directors of the Oregon Restaurant Association.

"This is more than a business, it is a labor of love," she says. "I am not trying to get rich; I am doing something I love: feeding people."

Despite the fact that she is working 16-hour days running two successful restaurants, Schroeder still finds time to explore new opportunities. Her latest venture is

"She is one of those special people who have the ability to conceptualize an idea and make it into reality."

SIERRA BURY Mother's Bistro

Balaboosta, a café on the same block as Mama Mia Trattoria that will open this spring.

Balaboosta, which is Yiddish for "perfect housewife," will serve corned beef and pastrami sandwiches, smoked fish bagels and matzo ball soup — foods that Schroeder says are not available elsewhere in Portland.

"I see my role as filling the culinary holes in Portland. Portland needs this and I want to share it," she says. "I would not open a restaurant without a vision because passion is really important, but when I see an opportunity, I feel like I have to seize it."

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