



A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Mark & Lisa Spedale \ *Primizie Catering*

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Mark and Lisa Spedale of Primizie Catering are quite the team, and they have been since their high school sweetheart days 17 years ago. This handsome couple works together in different aspects of the company. Mark, chef/owner, opened the company on his own in 2001, and Lisa started working full-time with him two and a half years ago as the director of catering. With the challenges they went through in opening their catering company at a time when Austin's economy was at rock bottom, this dynamic duo seems ready for anything, even opening an Italian restaurant this Fall somewhere in the east Austin area they love. While most people start the restaurant then branch out into catering, the Spedales went a different route.

"We were raising capital for the restaurant during the time when the economy crashed. We raised enough money to start the catering company, so we decided to start the restaurant later," says Mark. "We have enjoyed catering, and it is going to be such an intricate part of the restaurant as an extension of the catering business. They will work hand in hand together."

Mark and Lisa Spedale pause for a moment in their bustling east-side catering kitchen.

“It’s easy to kind of lose sight of who you are. You can’t be everything to everyone,” says Lisa. “Sometimes it’s like, we could do this, but that’s not who we are. Our company has integrity, and we have established the reputation we want,” says Lisa.

When Mark worked at a hotel in Houston, he would often sneak back into the kitchen to watch the chefs in action, as they were “breaking down whole fish.” It looked like so much fun that he decided to enroll in the Art Institute Culinary School in Houston. As a Sicilian, Mark has long had a passion for Italian cuisine, so many of their signature items have Italian and Mediterranean influences. Primizie is a custom catering company, dabbling in southwest, Indian, and Asian cuisines.

“After spending a dozen years in the culinary arts, working with many styles of chefs and types of cuisine, I was always drawn back to Italian cuisine because of the simplicity and freshness of it, and the raw ingredients,” says Mark. “Everything is so flavor forward, but simple. A typical dish has three to four ingredients, and it’s beautifully presented.”

Since Lisa mostly manages the event planning and sales side of the business and Mark spends his time in the kitchen next door, the co-owners usually aren’t together throughout the day. Mark enjoys working with his wife and can still remember the early days when he was managing every part of the business on his own.

“There was a lot of uncertainty at first and constantly trying to get your name out there. We didn’t know where to start or what our niche was,” says Mark. “It was a lot of cold calling and dropping samples of food off to get people to experience our food and see how different it was from the rest of the catered food in Austin.”

One of the biggest misconceptions about catering is that it’s just the food. There is no “dropping off a hot box of food” at Primizie. The Spedales are actually producing events each week from set up to take down, bringing the kitchen and the service to each event. “I love the challenge of it all—taking raw ingredients, going through the stages it takes to get to ei-

ther the end result of a dish or the end result of an event,” says Mark. “A lot of people come together to pull it all off.”

In every step of the development of their business, which is now thriving through the power of word of mouth, the Spedales hope to stay true to their vision. “It’s easy to kind of lose sight of who you are. You can’t be everything to everyone,” says Lisa. “Sometimes it’s like, we could do this, but that’s not who we are. Our company has integrity, and we have established the reputation we want.”

Nicole Potenza, an event planner for Primizie catering, agrees that her bosses have stuck to their vision and enjoys the family atmosphere that comes with working at Primizie. “It’s nice working for solid people with great values both at home and in the daily grind of running Primizie. Mark and Lisa’s way of working with staff and clients allows for creativity and improvisation,” says Nicole. “I have learned about food costs, balance, being flexible, and seeing that hard work pays off.”

The Spedales know the meaning of diligence, due to the extended hours of the catering business. When they do have free time, they like to spend it hanging out in their backyard with their two daughters and ordering pizza.

“It’s kind of hard because if you have a bad day, and your mad at your boss, you go home and he is still there. There is nobody to vent to,” says Lisa. “You have to stay on top of things and remember why you started your own business in the first place. Sometimes, it’s like gosh maybe we should go back to working for other people.” Mark interjects, “That thought lasts about less than a second.”

Lisa agrees, and they smile at each other. They have come a long way since their high school prom, watching each other grow every step of the way. They have done what they set out to do. The Spedales have a lot to be proud of. \ **LSF**



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