
ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

From the classroom to the boardroom

OU alumna Rosalie Vicari shares her journey from educator to COO of state's largest independent restaurant group



Oakland University alumna Rosalie Vicari, chief operating officer and co-owner of the Joe Vicari Restaurant Group

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Before she became the chief operating officer (COO) and co-owner of one of the largest restaurant groups in the state, Oakland University's School of Education and Human Services helped Rosalie Vicari discover her passion for teaching.

"It's been about 40 years since I graduated, but I still remember OU with very fond memories," said Vicari, who earned her undergraduate degree in education at Oakland University in 1979. "There were several professors I had there that inspired me and encouraged me to continue to pursue my education."



OU alumna Rosalie Vicari, COO and co-owner of the Joe Vicari Restaurant Group.

Vicari said she was inspired to attend OU based on the outstanding reputation of the university's School of Education and Human Services.

"OU had, and still has, a great education department," she said. "That's what drove me there, as opposed to Wayne State University or another institution. I felt like OU had the best education department, and I loved the class sizes and the professors. It was a good time in my life."

After graduating from OU, Vicari went on to earn a master's degree at Saginaw Valley State University, as well as a certification from the Michigan Dyslexia Institute.

"I did private tutoring because that's what fit into our schedule at the time," Vicari said. "Somebody had to raise the three kids along the way, so I would tutor while they were in school."

It worked out pretty well, until I decided to get into the restaurant business.”

Vicari and her husband, Joe, own and operate the Joe Vicari Restaurant Group. Headquartered in Warren, Mich., the group includes seven Metro Detroit Andiamo locations — with another scheduled to open in Fenton, Mich. this fall — two Joe Muer Seafood locations, Brownies on the Lake, The Country Inn (with three locations in Michigan), 29/41 Mediterranean Street Food (with five locations in Michigan, including one across the street from OU’s main campus), and the Andiamo Italian Steakhouse in Las Vegas. Combined, the restaurants employ over 1,100 people.

“The biggest challenge is finding the right people and putting them in the right places,” Rosalie Vicari said. “All of our restaurants are different. The demographics are different, the areas are different, etc. You have to try to find the right people and the right personalities for the right venues.”

While she’s always been supportive of the business, Vicari said she decided to take a more active role with the restaurant group about 15 years ago.

“What prompted that decision was really logistics of scheduling,” she said. “Joe worked later and my day would start early, and it felt like we were two ships passing each other in the night. Also, as our restaurant group had started to grow, I saw the need to get more involved.”

As COO and owner, Vicari’s responsibilities include overseeing all of the front of the house operations, preparing training manuals, and meeting with the corporate team on a weekly basis.

“I think having a background in education has helped me immensely in my role with the restaurant group,” she said. “One of the things that teaching teaches you is organization. It’s important to have a lesson plan. You don’t just walk into a classroom and wing it. When you have 35 kids sitting in front of you, you have to be very goal-oriented, and it’s the same in the restaurant business. You have to have a plan.”

For Vicari, her plans for the future include working less, travelling more, spending time with family, and celebrating the opening of the new Andiamo Restaurant in Fenton.

“We’re excited about it.” she said. “This restaurant will be the first complete build-out that we’ve

done. When we went in, there was nothing there but a dirt floor. Most of our restaurants have involved going into an existing restaurant, gutting it and working within the parameters of what's there. With this building, we're not limited by the confines of a space. We can do whatever we want with it. The possibilities are endless, just like in life."