

Alton Restaurant Receives February Small Business Award

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GODFREY – The Brown Bag Bistro has been chosen as the February 2022 RiverBend Growth Association Small Business of the Month award recipient.

Located at 318 East Broadway in Alton, mother-daughter duo owners Christine and Erin Velloff have kept the restaurant establishment going after starting with other family

members in the mix. “We were lucky enough to not have to let any staff go during the pandemic,” Christine noted.

In business since 2018, the duo currently employs 18, with most of their kitchen staff working close to 40 hours a week. “We have only been open for three and a half years and our business has grown exponentially,” said Christine. “In the near future, we are hoping to add in our own delivery service so that we can give our customers the best service they can get and move away from third-party delivery service. We also hope to expand the upstairs and add another kitchen on-site.”

The Brown Bag Bistro today reflects an extensive renovation undertaking to accommodate the needs of a restaurant and its customers. “This family business was started from a love of rehabbing properties, our love of food, and our love of being self-employed,” she added. “It was a vision to try and bring more foot traffic to the area as well. We have learned a lot along the way, and we learn more and more each day.”

“We show up to work every day having so much fun. It is extremely rewarding as well in getting the opportunity to make someone’s special day that much better by providing meals for baby showers, weddings, and other events and occasions,” Velloff said.

The Brown Bag Bistro continues to value community service and welcomes the opportunity to give back. They have supplied free meals to first responders and the local hospitals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They continue to offer 50 percent discounts to first responders every day. Providing Easter baskets to the Boys and Girls Club further allowed The Brown Bag Bistro staff to give back to the community that supports them.

“Our favorite though was the Carey K sandwich we did in December 2020,” Christine said. “We raised over \$5,000 for the Keay family through sales of this special menu item.” Carey Keay, co-owner of another local restaurant in Alton, had suffered a brain aneurysm in 2020 that resulted in a long hospital stay and expensive medical bills. The Velloffs wanted to extend a helping hand, donating half the profits from each specially named sandwich sold during its time on the menu that December to the Keay family.

Continually taking immense pride in everything they create and keeping a high standard in the food they send out of the kitchen; The Brown Bag Bistro offers uniquely crafted sandwiches as a part of the variety on their menu. They also offer soups, salads, appetizers, and desserts that include a choice of cheesecake options. Sandwiches like “The Wadlow” are the stuff of legends, a tasty tribute to Alton’s Gentle Giant Robert Wadlow with its sizable stack of flavor layered on top of French bread.

“We are very proud of our menu selection,” Christine noted. “Starting our business with absolutely no experience in the restaurant industry and learning from the ground up and dealing with obstacles such as the supply chain during this pandemic, has kept us on our toes and has also inspired us to be more creative with the available food. In fact, we started making our own roast beef in 2020 because the price of the roast beef we had been using skyrocketed. Now we sell more roast beef than we ever had before.”

“A strong social media presence, and having our pick-up window, have also proven to be of great benefit to our business growth and resilience,” she added. “Our repeat customers, along with all those who support us, further add to the pride we experience from what we’re doing here.”

Open daily at 10:30 a.m., the restaurant closes at 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, at 7 p.m. on Saturday, and is open until 6 p.m. on Sunday.

To learn more about The Brown Bag Bistro, visit online at brownbagbistroalton.com, find them on Facebook at [@thebrownbagbistroalton](https://www.facebook.com/thebrownbagbistroalton), or call (618) 433-9933.

The RBGA’s Small Business of the Month Committee recognizes a different member business each month for its outstanding efforts and leadership in the community. Committee members include Brenda Eardley, Kristen Ryrie, Leslie Schobernd, Martha Schultz, Amy Smith, and Kathy Weaver. To learn more about membership in the RiverBend Growth Association and the Small Business of the Month recognition, visit the RBGA website or call their Godfrey office.

The RiverBend Growth Association is the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development organization for the 11 communities known as the Riverbend. For more information about the Growth Association, please visit www.growthassociation.com or call (618) 467-2280.