



# **Brown Bag Bistro Mother-Daughter Duo on Food and Fame**

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ALTON - As The Brown Bag Bistro celebrates their [recognition from America's Best Restaurants](#), owners and mother-daughter duo Christine and Erin Velloff are reflecting on the restaurant's success.

Most people know The Brown Bag Bistro as the popular lunch spot it is today; after all, it's receiving national acclaim. But the spirit of the restaurant is much closer to home.

"Loving what you're doing — I think that's what's driven us a lot," Erin said. "And most of our staff has been here for years, too. I think everyone just has fun."

Erin explained that the decision to open a restaurant was her mom's idea. It was an exciting, if unexpected, chance to get involved in the Alton food scene.

"We had absolutely no experience," Erin said. "Kind of just on a whim, she called me when I was in college and was like, 'I'm going to open a restaurant. Do you want to help?'"

Erin said yes. They might not have known it then, but this project, which started with just the two of them, was the beginning of something much bigger.

But the duo had a lot to learn. Christine had never worked in food service; Erin had gained a little experience at a few restaurants in college. When Erin graduated in December 2017, she and Christine immediately started preparing to open the restaurant that coming spring in April.

Christine said they built The Brown Bag Bistro "from the ground up." It has grown exponentially since then.

"It's just been absolutely unreal ever since. It's surpassed everything we imagined, really, and it just continues getting better and better," Erin said, adding, "It's even been slightly overwhelming sometimes."

The Bistro serves soups, salads, sandwiches and desserts, among a few other dishes. "The Wadlow" is a popular sandwich with a nod to Alton history, but the Velloffs have a special place in their hearts for "The Sammy Roo" and "The Rosie Roo" reubens, named after Christine's parents. The full menu can be found on [their website](#).

Both women believe the sandwiches are a big part of their success. Erin also thinks the restaurant's location and consistency please both new and loyal customers.





“A lot of the sandwiches are something that you can’t find anywhere else,” Erin said. “Then especially in summer, people drive by and they see the patio, and that in itself is an allure to bring people in. So that’s been huge, but just the consistency of the food, that’s really what we aim for. And I think that we hear that a lot.”

Christine always wanted “a small, quaint little lunch spot.” While Erin echoed that sentiment, noting that the Bistro is “a lunch place through and through,” she added that they’re open for dinner and live music on the weekends. They also have a bustling to-go business and walk-up window, two services that have grown since the COVID-19 Pandemic.

But the real joy of the Bistro is the restaurant’s history and the owners’ obvious love for their work. Erin grew up in the house behind the Bistro; Christine still lives there today. The Brown Bag Bistro might be a relatively new Alton attraction, but the restaurant and the town have always been significant to the Velloff family.

Local love for the restaurant is about to expand to national recognition. But for both women, The Brown Bag Bistro simply feels like home.

“My mom and I, we’ve always been close, but it’s made us even closer,” Erin said. “That’s been the best part for me, just doing this with her and us laughing. We’re like, God, what are we doing? It’s so unexpected. But we really do have a blast. We look forward to coming in every day.”

More information about The Brown Bag Bistro can be found [here](#). [America’s Best Restaurants](#) will be filming their ABR Roadshow at the Bistro on June 28. The Velloffs encourage Alton residents to come to the Bistro that day to participate in the filming and enjoy a good meal.