Bella Milano Edwardsville Celebrates 20 Years With Ribbon-Cutting

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE: Bella Milano celebrated 20 years in business with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at their Edwardsville location on Tuesday. Tom Guarino, director of sales and hospitality for Bella Milano, said he appreciated the community's turnout to the ribbon cutting and their support over the past two decades.

" just kind of throwing a party for our 20th and the community has been amazing, they've responded tonight and everybody's been so gracious about our 20 years," Guarino said at the event. "It's because of the community that we're here 20 years, so we definitely appreciate that."

Guarino's father and his father's business partner, Craig Kalogerou, started Bella Milano 20 years ago after meeting through both owning Dairy Queens. Both Guarino and Kalogerou came from Italian heritage and had the vision to bring a proper Italian restaurant to Edwardsville - specifically along Route 157, which has seen lots of development in the 20 years since Bella Milano first opened there.

Guarino said the restaurant has come a long way from its early days, but he still aims to continue the legacy his father started with Bella Milano.

"It's just crazy to think about the beginning and where we started, and where we've come," Guarino said. "I lost my father a couple years ago … this is something that him and I had together. All the kids had their own thing, but this was our thing.

"Some of the most fun times planning the beginning - where are the tables going to be, where are we going to put the server stations, what's the menu going to be? It's just

exciting to see where the menu's gone, the staff - we've got staff that been with us the whole time. We couldn't do this without the amazing staff we have, we're thankful for every one of them.

Bella Milano regularly gives back to the Edwardsville community, which Guarino said is "one of the greatest," and he emphasized how much he appreciates their support and partnership.

"We're more than thrilled with the way the community's embraced Bella Milano, and just being here in the community - Edwardsville's got one of the greatest communities, and we're happy to be a part of that," he said. "We give back and the community supports us, and it's just been a real great partnership between us and the community, we couldn't be more thankful."

The celebration doesn't stop with the ribbon cutting, however - on Nov. 10, Bella Milano will be hosting a 20th birthday bash in the Leclaire Room on the Lewis & Clark N.O. Nelson campus, located at 600 Troy Road in Edwardsville. Featuring live music, multiple appetizer stations, multiple bars and more, Guarino said the event will have limited availability but tickets will go on sale in the next few weeks.

Guarino said what he cherishes most about Bella Milano are the friendships and relationships that have been built over the years.

"All the friendships we've made over the years, I say it all the time, but it's like I'm hosting a party every night with my best friends, and a lot of the customers that come in, I became very good friends with. Those relationships what doing business amazing, and what we love about this business."

To learn more about Bella Milano Edwardsville, visit their website or Facebook page. The full interview with Guarino and a video of the ribbon cutting is available at the top of this story or on Riverbender.com/video.