



Bella Milano Hosts 20th Anniversary Party

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - Bella Milano celebrated two decades of business in Edwardsville with a 20th anniversary party on Friday, Nov. 10, 2023 at the Lewis & Clark N.O. Nelson Campus in Edwardsville. The event capped off [months of promotions](#) celebrating this milestone and featured live music from the Robert Parry Band, several longtime employees and customers, and much more.

Tom Guarino, director of Sales and Hospitality for Bella Milano, said at the event that there were 200 people in attendance, including long-time customers and employees who were “having a wonderful time” celebrating and reminiscing on the past 20 years.

“200 people ... want to come and spend their time and money to celebrate our anniversary with us, and I just can’t tell you what an amazing feeling that is - to have people love Bella Milano as much as we do and want to celebrate it with us,” Tom said.

He added that it “couldn’t be done” without Bella Milano’s former and current employees, who have all helped “create the experience when you come in our restaurant.”

Owner Craig Kalogerou said that he and his late partner Sam Guarino - Tom’s father - never expected the restaurant to be this successful. When the two first started Bella Milano, critics were skeptical of the restaurant’s timing and location, but Sam and Kalogerou had a “vision” for the business.

“A lot of people thought when we came, that we were too early, and that where we were located at maybe was not the right spot,” Kalogerou said. “Our vision was, ‘If we build it, they will come,’ and they’ve done that from day one, and I cannot thank this community enough.”

Tom noted how fortunate Bella Milano is to celebrate 20 years in business, which he said is about double the average business's lifespan within the restaurant industry. Part of that success is driven by the restaurant's longtime patrons, many of whom attended the party.

One longtime patron, Susan Kurilla, said she got married when Bella Milano first opened in 2003, so the couple has "kind of grown up with them."

"We go all the time," Kurilla said. "We know the bartender, we know the servers, we know the owners, it's just a great family place."

Anne Fritz, another longtime patron, said the best part about Bella Milano are the connections you can make there.

"You think that you're going to just ... meet some great people, but at the end of it, you end up family with them," Fritz said. "They're amazing people - the entire staff and all the family."

Both Tom and Kalogerou are extremely grateful for the community's support as they mark this milestone.

"We've met so many people along the way," Tom said. "We couldn't be more happy with the way things have gone and the way the whole community has supported Bella Milano, and like I said, loves it like we do."

A video featuring more from the Bella Milano 20th anniversary party is available at the top of this story or on [Riverbender.com/video](https://riverbender.com/video).