



# WOMEN IN HOSPITALITY



## SOME OF THE INCREDIBLE WOMEN LEADING THE WEST VALLEY CULINARY SCENE

The food scene in the West Valley is rapidly changing, and some incredible women are leading that evolution, thriving in the demanding hospitality industry.

As Jennifer Garrett, General Manager of North Italia in Peoria, says, “It’s an industry that expects you to care deeply and give your all, whether a guest is celebrating a milestone or finding solace after a loss.”

Each of these six incredible women is answering that demand, bringing exceptional hospitality to North Peoria.

**“We offer many daily specials, so there’s always a reason to come and enjoy happy hour, fresh salads, bruschetta, and your custom pizza creation!”**

Brooklyn-born Tommasina Mamola has lived in the Valley since 1987. Her parents, originally from Italy, owned a pizzeria in Brooklyn, so the restaurant industry is in her blood. She fell in love with the industry and, with the help of her cousin, Franco, has opened four restaurant concepts, including North Peoria’s CHAR Pizzeria Napoletana ([CHARPizzeria.com](http://CHARPizzeria.com)).

“I am most proud of what I was able to do with CHAR in respect to my family heritage,” shares Mamola. “I would not have been able to do any of this without the support of my cousin and team.”

She explains that CHAR is a true Neapolitan pizzeria with a Vera Pizza Napoletana (VPN) certification. “The certification recognizes our wood-fired brick oven, hand-stretched dough made with ‘00’ Caputo flour, fresh San Marzano tomato sauce, and a huge assortment of fresh ingredients.”

Mamola finds many benefits to being a woman in an often male-dominated industry. “I lead by example and have great compassion for my team,” she explains. “I especially love it when a guest wants to tell my boss what a great job I’m doing!”

“My biggest reward,” explains Mamola, “is a happy guest, especially when they tell me how much our pizza reminds them of their time in Italy!”

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## Tommasina Mamola



Photo by Nichole Eckman



*Photo courtesy Upward Projects*

**“I’ve always been drawn to the energy of restaurants—the way they bring people together, create shared experiences, and turn simple moments into lasting memories.”**

Lauren Bailey moved to Arizona to attend Arizona State University and has never left. Today, she and her partner, Kevin, raise their 11-year-old son, Blake, in the Valley of the Sun.

She is CEO and Co-Founder of Upward Projects, the parent company behind Valley favorites Postino WineCafe ([PostinoWineCafe.com](http://PostinoWineCafe.com)), Joyride Taco House, Windsor, Churn, and Federal Pizza. The newest Postino is at The Park at 83 in Peoria.

Bailey believes hospitality was her destiny. “It didn’t take me long to figure out that it encapsulated everything I love—people, art, food, and making people happy.”

Bailey fell in love with the industry and sees the role of women in hospitality as a challenge. She believes in carving her own path and figuring things out rather than focusing on the difficulties.

“I’ve been fortunate to build Upward Projects with a culture that values inclusion, creativity, and leadership at every level—regardless of gender,” explains Bailey.

“Our restaurants are rooted in the idea of bringing people together over incredible food and drink, all in spaces that feel like a second home,” says Bailey. “Each of our brands is designed to be a gathering place where hospitality feels effortless and every detail, from the food to the music to the lighting, is intentional.”

## Lauren Bailey



**“I've always enjoyed cooking and am a secret science nerd fascinated by the science of cooking. Food brings people together all over the world.”**

## Chrissy Cetwinski



Chrissy Cetwinski acknowledges that hospitality is a demanding industry. “Hospitality is not for the thin-skinned. It’s ever-changing, unforgiving on the mind and body, and you must be able to take opinions and criticism.”

At age 12, she got her first restaurant job in her native Chicago, bussing tables at a local Chinese restaurant. “I was in awe watching the process of taking a few ingredients and creating something beautiful and tasty,” remembers Cetwinski.

Although she stayed home to raise her two kids, Nathan, now 29, and Alexis, 24, she took on management positions as they grew older, learning the back-of-the-house, bar, and office sides of the business.

When she and her late husband, Nick, moved to Vistancia in 2008, Cetwinski quickly embraced her new home in North Peoria. “Entertaining at my home for family and friends, throwing lavish parties just because, became a habit,” she explains. “Soon, people asked me to make menus and cook for their parties.”

Today, Cetwinski owns Gourmade By Chrissy ([GourmadeByChrissy.com](http://GourmadeByChrissy.com)), where she curates the best events for her clients. “I love sharing people’s most memorable days and events with them,” she says. “I try to remove the worry of event planning so they can concentrate on their day.”

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Photo courtesy North Italia

**“Hospitality is about creating experiences and connections. It’s a place where passion, leadership, and human connection come together—an incredible thing to be a part of.”**

Third-generation Arizona native Jennifer Garrett was initially drawn to the hospitality industry for the food. “But over time,” she explains, “I realized it was the people and the controlled chaos of a restaurant that truly stole my heart. That magical moment when passion, teamwork, and chaos collide is where I thrive—it’s what fuels my love for connection and hospitality.”

Garrett grew up surrounded by food. Her mother loved bringing people together, creating warmth and laughter around the table. Garrett started as a host with Fox Restaurant Concepts in 2016 and has worked her way through nearly every position and across brands. Now, as the General Manager of the new North Italia in Peoria ([NorthItalia.com](http://NorthItalia.com)), she feels she has found her forever home in the industry. “I’ve been a General Manager [of various North Italia locations] for years now, and it’s been an amazing journey full of growth, challenges, and strong leadership,” she explains.

Garrett, who lives in the West Valley, is passing her love of restaurants on to her son. He was stretching pizza dough at age six, bussing tables at age seven, and is taking his first culinary arts elective as a seventh grader. According to Garrett, her son loves showing off his knife skills, which he claims he “got from his mama!”

## Jennifer Garrett

**“Hospitality isn’t a job you clock in and out of—it’s a way of life. It thrives on precision, responsiveness, and the ability to create something memorable in real time.”**

## Kristine Short



*Photo courtesy Atlasta Catering*

Kristine Short not only got her first hospitality job at age 15, but she also met her future husband and business partner that year. She embraced both and has never looked back.

“Martha Stewart inspired me,” Short says. “Not just for her creativity, but for how she transformed atmosphere, conviviality, and memory-making into a dynamic, multi-faceted business. I love the idea that hospitality isn’t just about food—it’s about the experience, the details, and how people feel in a space.”

Short is the powerhouse behind Atlasta Catering ([AtlastaCatering.com](http://AtlastaCatering.com)), one of the brands that is part of Steve Short Culinary Team ([SteveShortCulinaryTeam.com](http://SteveShortCulinaryTeam.com)). Along with Atlasta, the Shorts are behind Cellar9 beverage catering, Casual Catering, Campus Provisions, which offers chef-centric on-location hospitality management, Short Hospitality, and Clear Stock Consulting, which advises hospitality clients.

Atlasta is a full-scale hospitality powerhouse. “We don’t just serve food,” explains Short. “We craft immersive experiences that foster connection, atmosphere, and lasting memories.” She explains that Atlasta operates like a restaurant, offering fresh, flavorful, chef-driven cuisine.

Like the other female hospitality superstars in this issue, Short describes the industry as constantly evolving. “It demands adaptability and foresight,” says Short. Their priorities are workforce development, sustainability, economic fluctuations, and supply chain unpredictability—all without compromising the guest experience.

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## Emily Ganem

**“Restaurants are built on people, from the front-of-house team, which creates a welcoming atmosphere, to the back-of-house team, which ensures every plate is perfect.”**

*Photo courtesy  
Ganem Companies*



Arizona native Emily Ganem co-owns Sky Restaurant Concepts with her husband, Parker. “It has been a team effort,” explains Ganem, “combining our strengths to create restaurants that bring people together.”

She explains that each concept—North Peoria-based Squid Ink Sushi Bar ([SquidInkSushi.com](http://SquidInkSushi.com)), Urban Agave ([Urban-Agave.com](http://Urban-Agave.com)), and the soon-to-open Sparrow, along with Phoenix-based Highball Cocktail Bar—is more than just food. “It’s about the experience, the community, and creating spaces where people love to gather,” says Ganem.

She points to “an incredible team of powerhouse women” who help drive Sky Restaurant Concepts’ success. Libby Estes is Director of Operations for the West Valley concepts, Libby Lingua is the partner and operator at Highball, and Cynthia Ganem is the accounting lead.

Emily Ganem and Estes agree that while one of the biggest challenges is maintaining consistency while adapting to an ever-changing industry, it’s worth it. “The biggest reward is seeing a restaurant thrive,” explains Estes. “When the energy is high, service is seamless, and guests have an incredible experience.”

Ganem agrees. “It’s about those moments when everything clicks, from a bartender crafting the perfect cocktail to a guest becoming a regular because they feel at home in our space,” she says. “The relationships we build—both with our team and our guests—make this industry so rewarding.”