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Interview with Kristen Ridout (Toro Sushi)

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Interview Transcript

Key: S = Sarah

N = Nick

K = Kristen

S: Umm.. so if you want to introduce yourself... umm go for it

K: Sure

S: Yeah!

K: Umm.. My name is Kristen Ridout, I own Toro Sushi in Carmel and we opened up about two years ago in 2020 and umm... I grew up in Pacific Grove so I'm a local girl but ya umm... been here for two years and it's been great

S: And I'm Sarah

N: I'm Nick

S: Going through the list of questions, you said you have been two doing it for about two years now, umm... What is your personal or family background in the restaurant industry?

K: Well, the first restaurant I worked at I was fifteen and it was at international cuisine in Pacific Grove

S: Oh yeah!

K: Umm... coincidentally the family that owns the restaurant, one of the brothers is my business partner here

S: Oh! Okay!

K: Umm... So we've been friends for the last fifteen years and uh actually his first umm... his first job in America, he's from Jordan, was at a sushi restaurant and he learned how to do everything from washing the rice to now he's just really good at it. So, umm... I worked in restaurants throughout high school and then in college I studied hospitality umm... worked in restaurants throughout college and then I was in country clubs for a while umm... my friend called me up one day during covid, and I had a great job, wasn't looking for another job or anything and he just said hey look at this spot it's really cute, its available. So I came with my now husband and we walked in and we were like this is awesome and ya so umm... so that's a little bit about my background with restaurants and the story behind this location, I didn't look around or anything, it kind of just presented itself... umm ya

S: That's awesome!

N: That's perfect, yeah!

S: And so we passed number three so do you have a favorite item on the menu? Umm.. as far as your menu selection or how was the menu created?

K: Umm... I love, I mean our Toro is really good like the restaurant's name is Toro but we tried sourcing different kinds of Toro but the one we've settled on, like one specific one, it's really good. Umm... our Japanese A5 wagyu is really tasty too. Yeah.

N: Sweet!

S: So you mentioned... sorry... Covid, how was your restaurant affected at all during that

K: Well, we umm... it's just different for us because we, instead of like, we had to be flexible the whole time. Like a lot of restaurants had to, you know, downsize but we were kind of creating it around covid. So, we didn't have the inside open at first, we only had our courtyard and one parklet. Umm... So ya so we started with just outdoor dining and in December of 2020 everyone closed for everything so we did takeout and I was terrified and we had to layoff all of our front house employees. It was really scary and we actually kind of thrived during that time because a lot of people, I mean everyone was eating takeout so umm... we did ok and uh and then all of a sudden indoor dining was happening like at the end of February we kind of heard whispers of it. We didn't have any furniture inside, we didn't have our bar, like we didn't have a lot of stuff. So umm... just like really being flexible with everything and molding you know and having the right attitude not being like ugh this is happening and just working with it is really important

S: Yeah!

N: Yeah!

S: Do you think that the highly touristed area helped with that?

K: Yeah! Definitely!

S: I'm going to kind of talk about the menu items a little bit, umm... What would you say is the hardest or easiest thing about the menu or in the restaurant industry?

K: I'd say the hardest thing about sushi is it's difficult, there's a lot of moving bits and pieces, I couldn't get Uni last week because the waters were too tough for the divers to go down in Santa Barbara. So they're just like certain things that make sushi tough, there's so many little things. Umm... I mean the easiest thing, Oh I will say another hard thing has been staffing too. Umm... Front of house staffing in Carmel is different, a lot of people come here to make good money, they know there is a lot of tourists that come to this area but as far as kitchen staff, Sushi guys, guys and gals are hard to find so umm... so that has been very difficult. Umm... the easiest thing I will say we purposefully simplified our menu so that people would come and wouldn't

have to flip through pages and pages of sushi rolls, umm... that makes it easier for the guest to order food and then also for the servers who input the food and also for the staff to make it so umm... that's a really nice thing about menu.

N: So you mentioned, umm... you get some of the stuff from Santa Barbara, where you get most of your fish and produce from? Is it from that area?

K: So the produce is very local, we live in a great, great spot for it, so I'm very blessed that way and our fish comes from all around the world. We use a few different companies, there's a couple Japanese importers umm... and we use a company called Royal Hawaiian, they're a sustainable fish company.

N: That's Awesome

K: They don't even sell Toro, they will not sell unsustainable products umm... so it really just depends on where fish does best

N: That's good! Umm... to the next, what are some of your key values in your restaurant, like what do you value the most about it, whether that be your staff, the food, whatever

K: I would say service because that's my background, I'm from high-end country club where you greet people by name, hi Mr. Smith can I get you your Kettle and Tonic with one ice cube, like that kind of really you know, service you can offer the guest and go the extra mile has always been my umm... my attitude with the restaurant and this staff we are all very close, we grew a lot over the last couple years. So just having a really tight community, we pool tips here, some places will do, you know, individual tips but we are very team oriented, team focused, we help each other out it's not like "oh you got a ten top, bye have fun", it's like no, we're all helping out.

S: Do you guys get a lot of regulars then?

K: Yeah, we do.

N: So, umm... is there anything that you would change about your restaurant, if you had the chance to start over? Like, is there anything you would do differently?

K: Ahhh, umm... I mean no

N: Yeah! Pretty satisfied with how it went?

K: I am!

S: Yes it's really cute

N: Yeah, I really like it

K: Thanks, Thanks