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Terri Sokoloff: Shaping Pittsburgh's restaurant scene

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Terri Sokoloff had no plan. After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh with a liberal arts degree, Sokoloff embarked on the difficult journey of finding her place in the world. After working in sales for a couple of years, Sokoloff decided to change her career path. She made a new plan which revolved around getting her real estate license and then finding a job. Turns out she didn't need to look for a job; a job found her.

Fast-forward to today and Sokoloff is the President at **Specialty Bar and Restaurant Brokers**, where she has been serving up her expertise for over 25 years. Sokoloff built Specialty Group with her husband, Ned, who was already handling liquor licensing. Their company aimed to consolidate all the necessary services involved in buying or selling a restaurant/bar under one roof. Sokoloff's first sale in this endeavor was a property on Penn Ave.--she didn't even know she was selling a property. "All I thought I was doing was showing them the place. But I didn't realize that they might want to buy it, and they wanted to buy it on the spot and I basically didn't know what to do. So I said 'Just follow me back to the office and we'll figure it out.'" Since that sale, she has been blazing ahead in the business, both witnessing and taking part in the change in Pittsburgh's restaurant industry. Compared to when the company first started in 1986, "There are so many options. To be able to help shape the scene is just exciting."



Photo courtesy of Terri Sokoloff.

Sokoloff certainly has been helping to shape the current scene. A couple of the establishments that she has helped to bring to Pittsburgh are Twisted Frenchman (East Liberty) and Chaz & Odette (Shadyside). When asked whether or not locally grown businesses do better in Pittsburgh than those headquartered out of town, she notes that "Pittsburghers tend to support Pittsburghers." This is clear from the number of restaurants, bars, and businesses that populate the city and make it unique. She takes pride in knowing that she is helping talented and deserving people make their dreams a reality. "Sometimes the people who are the most talented unfortunately don't get the opportunities because pockets and talent don't always go together."

Regardless of any obstacles that she encounters, Sokoloff enjoys what she does. "I like dealing with people who are creative, who have a vision, who are entrepreneurial, for whom this has been their dream and this is their end goal, and being a part of that is extremely rewarding and gratifying."

Although Sokoloff has been an integral player in Pittsburgh's restaurant industry, she knows one business move she will never make: open a restaurant of her own. "Of course I'm familiar with the kitchen, on how to sell a restaurant--but I can't boil water. I leave the cooking to my husband."

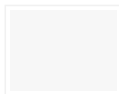
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