

Bricks & Mortar Bar and Bistro

The Old Market's Hidden Gem

By Sally Kline



l-r: Head Chef Kelly Michael Wajda, Owner Janet Van deWalle, and Lead Bartender Tamara Christensen

With the beginning of the New Year, we felt it was time to revisit a hidden gem tucked into a corner of the Old Market: Bricks & Mortar Bar and Bistro. The venue is located just off the beaten path, at 11th and Jones. Happy hour is a great time to check it out. “Our happy

hour runs every day we are open—Tuesday through Saturday, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.,” notes owner Janet Van deWalle. “On Friday and Saturday nights, we also have a reverse happy hour from 10 p.m. until midnight.” Janet shares that Bricks & Mortar has developed a reputation for the best happy hour in the Old Market, and it’s easy to see why. “Our specials include half price on all 25-plus wines by the glass, half price on specialty cocktails, \$1 off all beer, and a great happy hour food menu. Our guests come for the specials, but they stay way past happy hour for the ambience, the food, and the service.”

“Bricks & Mortar is the perfect place for a romantic evening for two, happy hour with your coworkers, a girls’ night out, dinner with your family, or an escape from the craziness of the day,” Janet continues. “We have regulars who join us almost every night for a glass of wine or a cocktail, just to unwind, sit at the bar, and talk to friends.” (Does that remind anyone else of a certain Boston bar where “everybody knows your name?”) Bricks & Mortar is also a very popular location to host a corporate cocktail party, corporate meeting, wedding rehearsal, or wedding reception. “We also excel as a fun place for bachelorette parties and wedding and baby showers,” says Janet.

Bricks & Mortar was recently named by N.P. Dodge as one of the “10 Best Places to Throw a Party in Omaha.” Janet was honored to be in such good company, she says. “We were included with some other terrific Omaha venues!” The venue was designed by an architect who designs wine tasting rooms in the Pacific Northwest, and it’s unlike any other place in the city. “A comment that I consistently hear from our guests is that Bricks & Mortar is beautiful... I agree!”

“None of this could have happened without the great team on board here at Bricks & Mortar,” Janet explains. Head Chef Kelly Michael Wajda is a native of Omaha. “Kelly joined us several months ago and brings an attention to detail to every dish he creates,” Janet says. Kelly draws his inspiration from his experience being stationed with the Navy in New Orleans and Virginia. Now back in Omaha with his family, he focuses on Asian and Latin cuisine. “He showcases his passion and talent in our new menu, which he created to complement our extensive wine list,” Janet elaborates. “He uses feedback from our guests to grow as a chef, and he’s always looking

to stay ahead of trends while using local sources and international flavors.”

The front of the house is handled by Tamara Christensen. In 1996, she faced becoming a single mom with three children to support. She didn’t have any work experience outside the home, so she entered the restaurant industry at entry level—waiting tables. Tamara was pleasantly surprised to find that she really enjoyed the friendly, fast-paced, and competitive work environment. “I have served, bartended, and managed in a variety of dining establishments,” she shares. After 21 years in the restaurant industry, Tamara is the lead bartender for Bricks & Mortar. “Over the years, I have met many people from all walks of life, and I use my many years of experience to provide first-class service to our customers,” Tamara asserts. “I enjoy what I do, and I am determined to work hard and always provide a pleasant dining experience.”

Janet describes the last four and a half years of owning Bricks & Mortar Bar and Bistro as the most intense learning experience of her life. “I have always appreciated the restaurant industry. After owning this restaurant, my respect for those in the industry has skyrocketed!” Her general manager, Manny Chavez, recently left the restaurant to pursue other interests, and Janet takes this opportunity to thank him publicly. “Manny is the person responsible for bringing Bricks & Mortar to the point that it is today,” Janet shares. “My heartfelt thanks go out to him and his intense hard work to bring me this great team...to create the restaurant. I could not have done this without him. Thank you, Manny!”

Bricks & Mortar Bar and Bistro is open at 1037 Jones Street, Tuesday through Thursday, from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m., and Friday and Saturday, from 4 p.m. to midnight. Call the restaurant at 402-934-0005 or call Janet directly at 402-681-8203. You can check them out online at bricksandmortarbarandbistro.com. Stop in soon! **WE**

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