



Sibling owners of SaladWorks Virginia Beach celebrating three years in business

By Sean C. Davis - August 17, 2017

[SaladWorks Virginia Beach](#), located in the Hilltop West shopping center, is celebrating its third anniversary this week. Southside Daily called the owners, siblings MaryAnne Cohen and John Reddecliff, to talk about the ups and downs of running your own business and what makes them unique.

The following conversation has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Sean Davis: Your sense of family was a big factor in your decision to go into business. Can you talk about that?

MaryAnn Cohen: John and I have maintained a close relationship throughout our lives, **quite honestly ... We actually lost our dad when we were young, I was 13 and John was 9,** and so that was something that sort of shaped both of us for **everything that's happened** since then. We lost our mom a little bit later on, but she was also fairly young when she died, so it was just the two of us and we have a small extended family.

We started joking it was time to start a new chapter in our lives and try something new and maybe we should work together. Then our spouses got involved in the conversation and we all felt like it might not be a bad thing so we started snooping around to see what might be out there that we could wrap our arms around. I think I can speak for John too, a restaurant was certainly not at the top of the list.

It's been a fun learning process. We've learned together, we've stumbled, we've fallen, we've gotten back up and we had a lot of great successes. We feel honestly very, very grateful to the customers in this area, the people who have supported us all three years.

SD: I think I read that neither of your backgrounds were in restaurants?

John Reddecliff: MaryAnne was in nursing and I was in banking. Post-nursing MaryAnne worked for a non-profit for a while in a volunteer leadership role and I had my own business. I was a residential general contractor.

And that kind of led to us to getting together because MaryAnne was anxious to do something outside the volunteer world and I was looking for something different and enjoyed the entrepreneurial side of owning your own business.

SD: What is it that makes SaladWorks unique? What is it that made it attractive to you?

JR: You can eat here so many different ways — we have soups, we have sandwiches, we have paninis, every salad you can make into a wrap.

SaladWorks is sort of an every man's salad concept in addition to [being] organic. You can eat the real organic way, but you can also eat a salad with ham and turkey and that type of thing on it as well.

SD: To jump back to your backgrounds, what were the biggest hurdles that you had to get over, and how did your previous experience help you?

JR: **There are no weekends in the restaurant business ... and then the obvious other hurdle was understanding the restaurant business itself. Having been in banking, I certainly got an opportunity to look at a lot of different businesses and you end up learning a little bit about all of them but you don't know a lot about any of them. The hurdle was understanding the nuances of a seven-day-a-week business, the ability to create a perfect product every time for every customer. That's a lot different than approving somebody's loan.**

MC: To be perfectly honest with you, I tend to be a doer. And in this kind of business, you really have to step back and not always be the doer. You have to allow other people to do **and that's just not my natural inclination. The best part of this business for me is the**

interaction with the customer. I really like to spend as much of my time doing that as I can, **meaning that I don't need to worry about the doing part, the behind the scenes stuff.**

SD: What advice would you give yourself three years ago, or maybe someone who is starting a business or opening a franchise now?

JR: I think my only advice, then and now, would be that it is hard, hard, hard work. I think **that sometimes people who get into franchises have this preconceived notion that they're going to pay a \$15,000 or \$20,000 franchise fee and then they're going to have their annual income coming in the next month.**

SD: Were you already living in Virginia Beach or was that a decision you made to open it here?

JR: **I was living in Virginia Beach, I've been here 30 years now. I came down after college and never left, so this has been my home. I knew this area very well. MaryAnne has moved around, and she was living in Richmond and there was already a franchisee in Richmond.**

Virginia Beach is pretty healthy, it's won a lot of awards for being a health-conscious community and what not.

MC: **I think the biggest challenge for us... I knew it would be hard to get the word out, as a new brand in a brand new market, but I really have been amazed by how long it takes. Three years later—every business owner will tell you this happens it's just hard to imagine—that people will drive by every day and never see you, and then three years go by and they all of a sudden see you. That's been pretty eye opening.**

SD: You mentioned that you were planning on opening another store, or multiple stores?

RJ: We sure would like to. Certainly our near-term plans call for as many as three. **'Frustrated' is probably a strong word but we're a little bit frustrated that we haven't been able to find the right location for number two yet. I think in a perfect world, we would have been bringing a second store online this year but the commercial real estate market here is**

pretty tight. And one of the things we have learned is that you can't make a bad decision with location. We're trying to be patient but our goal is to have at least two more.

We certainly would like to be in the Town Center area, we'd like to be in the Greenbrier area of Chesapeake and we'd like to be down in Norfolk in Ghent.

SD: I was scrolling through your Facebook earlier and I think I saw something about a charity. Is that part of your operation as well?

MC: Volunteerism and charitable giving were part of how we were raised. So it kind of was a no-brainer to do something... We are partners with some of the schools in the area, they call it 'Partners in Education.' Basically what that involves are nutritional educational things, we do demonstrations, one of their little art classes will draw pictures of salads and cute things like that.

RJ: **We've done cash-olla** nights where we raise money and give the proceeds to charity.

MC: A lot of organizations will reach out to us, whether it's a gift card for a silent auction or, this particular one, they reached out because they were doing a lot of work with the girls, trying to to give them small business and entrepreneurial skills and so forth. They were looking to feed them and they called to say that the girls eat a lot of pizza and a lot of subs, and they really would like to offer them something a little more healthy. And of course that's right down our alley, and that's the kind of stuff that we really enjoy doing.