



The Strip's **In The Kitchen**
Cooking Up Something



K.C. Lapiana would probably not be offended if you said her place is In The Kitchen. That is because this trained chef and professional retailer has named her high-end kitchen-supply store just that. So “in the kitchen” is not just a location to this successful entrepreneur—it is a phrase that represents her store, her livelihood, her business vision, and her dream.

In The Kitchen got its start in 2002 at Wexford Plaza. Lapiana recalls, “We

tools.” In fact, the store’s staff is extremely well trained to give one-on-one attention for a unique customer experience.

One could say that Lapiana has been “in the kitchen” most of her adult life. After she graduated from the Culinary Arts Institute (currently known as Le Cordon Bleu School), she was responsible for creating a cooking-school program for Williams-Sonoma in 1987. “Then furthering my reach in 1992,”

Hot in Pittsburgh for 10 Years

By Christopher Cussat

originally were a 2,000-square-foot store selling kitchenware, coffee, prepared foods, and cheeses.” In addition, the store also offered cooking classes. After being at this site for five years, Lapiana began looking for an additional location. “At that time, Wholey’s Balcony Cookware shop in the Strip was closing and we decided to purchase it in 2007.” Although Lapiana kept both locations open for a year, she eventually decided to consolidate her efforts and concentrate on the Strip District location.

Lapiana describes In The Kitchen first and foremost as a full-service business. “Our most important job is giving our customers the most educated experience coupled with the best culinary

Lapiana adds, “as we moved to different markets establishing culinary cooking-school programs for independent

kitchen stores on the East Coast, I was part of a creative culinary team for the Harris Teeter Supermarkets’ in-store chefs program, creating prepared foods-to-go.” Before opening her own store, Lapiana also managed a high-end kitchenware store in Portland, Maine.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of In The Kitchen is that the store truly adheres to a good, better, and best assortment of products. For example, the store currently sells 13 different knife lines and eight various lines of cookware.



Photo by In-Vision Studio

In The Kitchen owner K. C. Lapiana

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Photos by In-Vision Studio



Photo by Chuck Shane

Assistant manager Jodi West

The In The Kitchen staff (left to right, back): Carlee Freeman, Mitchel Holt, John Deutschbauer; (front) Barb Sander, Suzanne Reber, and owner K. C. Lapiana

“Additionally, we have ethnic products from Italy, Spain, and Asia—and we sell many items made in the USA as well,” Lapiana says. “We also set ourselves apart by offering personnel that are dedicated and vested in the company.”

Her short-term goals for the store include remaining constant by providing the highest quality goods with the support of the best educated personnel. “Long-term goals are to provide Pittsburgh with the best customer service and a comfortable shopping experience. We’re hoping to gain loyalty and help future generations navigate their culinary experience,” Lapiana says.

Currently, In The Kitchen is planning a remodeling project that will make the store more easily accessible and easier to shop in. “We also will be providing more product assortment, and we will relocate our kitchen to better serve our customers with product samplings, celebrity book signings, and free demonstrations,” she notes.

The store’s keys to success continue to be always having customers first and foremost in mind, as well as working extremely hard to listen to their needs, and acting appropriately to provide the best products and service. Lapiana’s most important learning experience in

building a successful business has been adhering to company policy and procedures because she believes that this is the best barometer in appealing to and satisfying most customers. “I thoroughly enjoy the interaction with our customers—they love our service and products, so it makes it very easy to come to work each day,” she adds.

Since In The Kitchen moved to the Strip District from its original location in Wexford five years ago, Lapiana has had the unique opportunity to compare two different shopping areas. She now describes the Strip as being a very unique shopping mecca and notes that



although she misses her Wexford shoppers, they still frequently come down to the Strip location to shop. “First of all, the Strip is a real ‘foodie’ section of Pittsburgh—these customers come to

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the Strip for the finest in all foods from all independent family-owned merchants. That's extremely rare and

the marketplace in a big way. In addition, outdoor entertaining is growing and there are several segments in house-

wares focusing on taking your kitchen outside." She adds that there are also plenty of new products geared toward all ages, which can help produce a creative, family-oriented, kitchen experience.

"I'd like the readers to know that all of us at In The Kitchen work our hardest to create a unique and enjoyable shopping environment—we simply just want to make cooking for your family and friends fun and easy," Lapiana concludes.

In The Kitchen is now celebrating its 10th year in business. A visit to Pittsburgh's "Top Specialty Kitchenware Sup-

unique," she explains. "Secondly, the restaurants are also independent and offer a wide variety of foods to choose from—and all of this mixes together to provide many full days of entertainment. I think the Strip District is a fun, great place to offer our services, and we get a lot of enjoyment just being here!"

Through her work, Lapiana has also discovered that the Strip District is known nationwide. "I travel extensively for business and I always meet someone from Pittsburgh or they have family or friends in Pittsburgh—and they all know the Strip District." She notes that tourists also play a huge supportive role for her business. "They come from all over the country and are extremely happy to find out that we have a web presence—so when they get home they can log on and make further purchases and also sign up for our bi-monthly newsletters."

Lapiana just returned from Atlanta on one of the largest buying trips she makes each year. "I came back with lots of new products—for example, color, glass, and melamine seem to be entering



Photos by In-Vision Studio



ply Store" will reveal why the *Tribune-Review* voted it "Best Kitchen Store in Pittsburgh" for 2009, 2010, and 2011.

Located at 1725 Penn Avenue, In The Kitchen may be contacted by phone at 412-261-5513; website: www.shopinthekitchen.com; phone 412-261-5513. 📍

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