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<Arizona Chain Reaction – Business of the Month profile>

DUCK AND DECANTER (January 2005)

Though it may not be listed as an official historical landmark, the Duck and Decanter is nevertheless a point of pride for Phoenix residents. Acquired in 1972 by Dort and Earl Mettler, “the Duck” has delighted customers with its prize-winning deli creations and unique epicurean services for over 30 years. With more than 50 prestigious awards from local and national periodicals and associations such as Mobil Travel Guide and Zagats, the Duck has clearly earned its reputation as a specialty food, beverage and retail pioneer.

“Many corporate businesses have worked to create their ‘culture,’ but ours is based on history,” says Tod Mettler of his family’s business. “We’re home to a lot of memories for people in the community.” Perhaps that’s because the Duck is more of an experience than an eatery. With gourmet catering, a specialty meat and cheese club, unique coffee, tea, wine and beer selections, gift baskets and giftware, the Duck has something for everyone.

The Duck is also a second family for its employees, with most staff boasting five or more years of employment, and nearly all management comprised of former staff members. “Everyone considers themselves part of the family,” says Mettler.

Like any good family, everyone does their part to keep the operation running. When the Duck’s central location building began to show signs of wear and tear after 30 years of occupancy, it was the Duck’s employees who said, “Let’s do something.” With a generous donation from their property managers, the staff pitched in to make improvements, including launching a unique landscaping initiative in which every employee chose their own plant or flower whose care they would be responsible for. In addition, they received fresh paint and new patio furniture to complete the improvement project.

It’s that kind of direct and flexible communication that Mettler thinks is the greatest advantage of an independent business. “I’ve noticed this not only at the Duck, but also with our vendors that are independent, family-owned businesses.” The ability to express ideas – right or wrong – is what drew Mettler back to the Duck after completing his degree at the University of Arizona and working for Jamba Juice in California and Arizona. “I learned a lot about the difference between working for a huge corporation versus a mom-and-pop business,” says Mettler.

That’s why Mettler is proud to be a member of Arizona Chain Reaction. “This is such a great organization,” says Mettler. “We contribute as much as we can. I even did most of my Christmas shopping with AZCR businesses!” Mettler actively seeks to support other independents by choosing local vendors like Middle Eastern Bakery, Basha’s, Fairytale Brownies and local artisans to supply most of the Duck’s giftware, food products and supplies.

The Duck has a long tradition of community service, a core value included in their mission statement. The Duck has supported local high schools including Xavier and Brophy College Preparatory and Central High School. They are also involved in the Downtown Phoenix Partnership, the Rosson House, Herberger Theatre, the Arizona Heart Institute, Arizona’s Quest for Kids and, when it was active, AIDS Project Arizona.

Mettler plans a long career with the Duck, ensuring that his family’s business continues to be a monument in the lives of Valley residents. In his spare time, Mettler enjoys bicycling and running and renovating his older home with the same attention to details that’s made the Duck so successful.

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