

Debbie Durham, Taking Care of Business for 7+ Years

Debbie Durham has been employed by Firebirds in StoneCrest aka “The Mother Ship” since May of 2002, making her the longest tenured hourly employee with Firebirds. From my perspective as the Managing Partner of that location for the past three years, she has been a constant reminder of how fortunate I am to have the employees that I do in this restaurant.



Debbie has worked the exact same schedule five days a week for the past seven years and with the exception of one week a year for vacation she has never missed a day of work. Her relationship with both guests and employees is unparalleled; indeed she is the constant rock that holds the server staff together. Gerald Pulsinelli is constantly speaking of having that Hospitality Mentality, and it is not unusual for Debbie’s regular guests to wait an hour or more for one of her tables to come open. It is not unusual on the weekend to have my own call ahead seating list for Debbie’s section. In an economic environment that can be described as bleak, Debbie continues to pay the bills by keeping her station filled with the guests she has been taking care of for years. They come for the Firebirds food for certain but the main reason they come is to see Debbie.

In addition to being a server, Debbie has been a trainer for as long as anyone can remember. She has been as responsible as anyone for the success of the StoneCrest restaurant; there has not been a server hired in my three years as Managing Partner that hasn’t spent at least one shift or had one food show with Debbie. She has also been one of the first ambassadors for our style of service for at least 25 MITs that have been through training at the StoneCrest location.

As GMs and Managing Partners we constantly speak about the importance of selection, hiring and training. Debbie is an example of what happens to our business when we hit a home run in that area. In a business that

is dominated with staff that is moving through their jobs on their way to what they believe will be a more prosperous career, Debbie is a role model for my entire staff. She is a testament to what a strong work ethic and a hospitality mentality can do not only for herself, but for the entire restaurant. She is one of the hardest working individuals I have come across in the 25 years I have been in this business and I am proud to have her on my team. Thank you Debbie!—Michael Stephan



“It has been a pleasure working with Debbie over the past seven years. I was fortunate enough to have her on the team when I was the General Manager of StoneCrest. It has been an honor to see her grow into the trainer position. Her consistency and commitment to the Hospitality Mentality make her an asset to the Firebirds Team.”—Gerald Pulsinelli, Market Partner

Reminiscing in Richmond—by Lucy Mitzner

As football season gets underway, both of the Richmond Firebirds are reminded of their participation in the recent James Farrior Foundation Golf Tournament from this summer. The Richmond locations joined together to sponsor the 8th hole for the tournament that brought the Pittsburgh Steelers to Richmond. Our Firebirds team served over 150 hungry golfers and football players, with many of them coming back multiple times to sample our delicious food. We served a variety of items, but the true show stopper was our refreshing desert pear lemonade, catching the eye of every person who walked by the 8th hole! As one of the event organizers stated, having Firebirds there "added a touch of true class to the whole event." Big thanks to Chef Dan and Brooke from Richmond Belvedere, and Kim, Chef Mike, Vana, and Maddy from Richmond Short Pump for representing Firebirds with such class. And extra thanks to Momma Kozzie who was our fearless leader, orchestrating the day's events and hoping for Michael Strahan to drive over the hill on a golf cart.



Baby Ian

This summer was the time for the booming baby boys to make their way onto the scene of the Firebirds family. Baby Ian was born in August as the newest addition to Fredericksburg's Max Maxwell and family. We've heard reports that Ian already has his own reusable Starbucks bottle.....like father, like son! And September brought a new family member to Richmond Belvedere's Colin Nelson and his family. Baby Oscar is said to be a strapping lad who has already been seen helping the elderly cross the street. Guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree! Welcome Ian and Oscar, and congratulations to the Maxwell and Nelson families!



Baby Oscar



Throughout the summer, Short Pump Firebirds participated in the outdoor concert series, featuring local bands, that was organized by the Short Pump mall. Every Thursday evening, Firebirds and Pottery Barn sponsored the VIP lounge. These guests received comfortable seating in a prime location to view the concert, and were served delicious appetizers provided by Firebirds. Taking part in the concert series, I had the opportunity to talk with the VIP guests, as well as many other concert-goers, about Firebirds and make many new friends for the Short Pump and Belvedere Firebirds!



In August, Richmond Belvedere took part in Richmond Indoor Sports Experience's (RISE) family fun day to benefit the Starlight Foundation of the MidAtlantic Region, which supports children with chronic and life-threatening illnesses. James Roehrick and I were there to speak with the 150 members and their guests about our new location and the great promotions that we have going on in the restaurant! We also served up our yummy cheesecake bites to all of the people that stopped by our table. We made many new friends and fans of our cheesecake bites with people coming back in "disguise" for seconds and thirds! It was a great event to take part in to support such a worthy cause, as well as to further establish our presence in the Midlothian community. We are sure to see some of those faces in the restaurant in the near future!

Richmond Short Pump was busy promoting Firebirds outside of the restaurant this past week at the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce event, BIZLINC! The convention brought together 200 businesses in the Richmond area to network and advertise for their companies and Firebirds quickly became the favorite booth at the convention! Service manager, Fatih Batuk and I were there to serve the ever-popular crème brulee cheesecake bites. Everyone raved about our dessert, saying it was the best tasting food there! We also heard some terrific feedback about both Richmond restaurants. Many guests told us that they were blown away by the service and the great food, which assured that they would be coming back for repeat visits. Thanks to all of the staff in both restaurants for representing Firebirds in such a stellar fashion!



Bama's Best—by Jennifer Mills

This month has been quite a learning experience for all of us in Birmingham! Having just taken over the Sales Director position, I have had a month full of firsts. From charity functions, golf tournaments, food and wine tasting events to a 90 guest rehearsal dinner, we have experienced them all – and with great success! On August 27th we donated our signature Lobster Spinach Queso and cheesecake bites to show support for “She Dances”, a charity aimed at providing healing, hope and a future to girls who have been victims of human trafficking. The event was at *Wine'd Down*, a local wine bar and featured a modern day toga party, where many of our staff members joined us—togas and all!



The following night, we were lucky enough to host a rehearsal dinner for a local couple and 90 guests. We transformed the dining room with fresh rose petals and white beaded votive holders. The majority of these guests had not dined with us before but were so impressed that many of them joined us the following night to try out some of our other tasty dishes.

On August 31st, we were off to the Hoover Chamber of Commerce Golf Tournament. We brought snack-sized bags of our sugar-spiced pecans with VIP cards attached and handed them out as a much-needed mid-tournament treat. The players were very thankful and we have since seen many of them in to redeem their cards. We also had a couple of our staff members volunteer their time to man our sponsored hole and talk all things Firebirds to the players and other volunteers. Thank you, Libby and Daniel!

On September 17th, we participated in the “Taste of Shelby County.” It is a premier food and wine tasting featuring local chefs and wine distributors. We served our Lobster Spinach Queso in martini glasses for a presentation fitting the event’s name perfectly. We had an opportunity to chat it up with current and future guests while serving what event guests called “by far the best food at the tasting.” Overall, it has been a GREAT month out-and-about in the community and with four charity golf tournaments creeping up on us, we have got many more opportunities to make new friends and raving fans in our community!

A Local Celebrity—by Bryan Liesko

On Labor Day, Firebirds StoneCrest had the opportunity to participate in the Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon; we were the sole dinner sponsor for the Charlotte broadcast. Yum Jung-Hoon, key employee, and I presented the Mixed Greens Salad, Parmesan Mashed Potatoes and Buffalo Meatloaf to feed about 100 volunteers, crew and family members. We also had 2 TV spots where I was able to speak about Firebirds’ food and show off the Strawberry Shrimp Salad, Filet, Loaded Baked Potato and the Creme Brulee Cheesecake, as well as discuss what a great opportunity it was for us to get involved in the community. It was a great time and everybody absolutely LOVED the food. The local portion of the telethon raised almost \$600,000 (which stays local) and nationally they raised over \$60.5 million! Thanks Team StoneCrest!



Fall Fashion Trends...

This season argyle sweater vests will be the hottest trend. Here are Max “Panda” Liberman (FB Raleigh) and Lisa “Big Momma” Kozloff (Market Partner) showing their fashion sense. Don’t hate – appreciate!

Maybe we should evaluate our MIT selection process? Manger in training, DeMarcus Campbell, showcases his ability to wear the concho belt as part of his uniform.



In Support and Remembrance on 9/11

On September 11th as the entire nation remembered the events of 9/11/01, all Firebirds Restaurants made a point to support a few of our local civil servants who help and protect us on a daily basis. Thank you to all the Firefighters and Police officers across our great nation!



**FIRE STATION #2
WINSTON-SALEM, NC**



**FIRE STATION #56
OMAHA, NE**



**FIRE STATION #191
PEORIA, AZ (PHOENIX)**



**FIRE STATION #3
MEMPHIS-ARLINGTON, TN (BARTLETT)**



**FIRE STATION #4
MIDLOTHIAN, VA (BELVEDERE)**



**FIRE STATION #74
TUCSON, AZ**



**FIRE STATION #4
HOOVER, AL (BIRMINGHAM)**



**PARKWOOD VOLUNTEER FIRE
DEPARTMENT #1 DURHAM, NC**



**FIRE STATION #28
CHARLOTTE, NC**



**FIRE STATION #283
CHANDLER, AZ**



**FIRE STATION #9
RALEIGH, NC**



**FIRE STATION #5
COLLIERVILLE, TN**



**FIRE STATION #13
RICHMOND, VA (SHORT PUMP)**

Fun With Firemen...



Lots of changes are happening within the four walls in Collierville and it starts with the change up of the management team. New GM Willie Bryan has been with Firebirds for about two years, starting out as the Service Manager in Tucson, AZ. He made his move out to Collierville mid-summer and is transitioning into his new role with high hopes and a positive outlook!! Also from out West, Arizona native and already established Executive Chef Jason Polley, has been In the Memphis market for over nine months. He joined us in Collierville in February of this year after working with Firebirds for over six years. Jason has been working diligently with his staff in the kitchen to form a solid team in the back of house. Rory Martin has been bouncing around from the AZ and Memphis markets. He finally landed with us in Collierville after being with the concept for over six years as well. He's been in Collierville for almost a month but his presence and his drive have already proven to be an asset to our restaurant. Corey Milton, Service Manager, is a true Memphian. He has been with several other concepts locally over the years. We got the pleasure of having him join the Firebirds team just a few short weeks ago. Corey brings with him the knowledge of the area, a strong desire to coach and train and a playful demeanor that keeps the staff and the rest of the management team lighthearted. And lastly, I round out the group after resuming the role as Bar Manager. I have been with Firebirds Collierville for almost two years. I have seen a lot of changes during my tenure and these mentioned here are by far the biggest and the best! Through the ongoing changes I have done my best to help keep the staff positive and to help ease the rest of the team into their new roles within our restaurant. It only took a short time for the team to really gel and start working together. As a team we are rebuilding and coaching the staff to be top performers. The communication is constant and goals have been set and continue to be achieved. And while we still feel like there's a lot to accomplish, we are certain that in time everything will come together! Great job Team Collierville!

New Kids on the Block—

by Christie Griffin

Tucson Talks—by Mike Wolf

During the market operations review meeting held in Tucson last quarter, there was never a dull moment. Tucson has always been a bit closer to nature than most of the other Firebirds locations. (I'm sure that you all remember the hairy spider mentioned in the last edition of *The Fire Inside*.) I have lived here for a little while now and have witnessed javelinas, coyotes, snakes of all types, and now something a bit more dangerous. We were staying at a local hotel set up on the Catalina Foothills Mountain range, which is perfect territory for all types of wildlife. As it was just supposed to be a quiet afternoon after the meetings, I was packing up and about to head towards the lobby for check out when I stepped outside my room to be greeted by a 30 pound bobcat! This particular beast stared me down with pupils dilated and thoughts of a quick lunch, but then turned towards an easier prey with more meat...Stevo was standing behind me. I knew I stood a chance for survival if I ran, but knew I would have to sacrifice Stevo with his extra bulk and slower foot speed. We both froze up and prayed for a quick death, but the bobcat apparently decided that I was too much of a challenge and Stevo would be too marbled a lunch so the beast turned back to his natural surroundings in search of an unsuspecting rabbit.



As perfect weather set the stage for another great event in Tucson on September 25th, Firebirds donated delicious samples of Lobster Queso at an event called Grape Expectations, benefitting the Ronald McDonald House. There were over 500 attendees and we were able to go through over 450 samples during the evening. Wine vendors from all around town also donated samples of their "juice," and silent auctions and raffle ticket sales helped to raise money to benefit the Ronald McDonald House. Our two stellar employees, Christine Majonica and Laura Anderson, and our head chef Scott Montgomery were busy making friends and talking about our concept; they even scored a bunch of email sign ups while handing out our tasty treats. We wowed many prospective diners as well as our regular guests who attended the event! Thanks Team Tucson!

In the 'Park

Along with our one year landmark came SouthPark's first team of Certified Corporate Trainers. Meg Clark, Nikki Davis, Bradley Davis, Matt Thomure, Scott Pierpont, and Fletcher Riemke have spent a long summer showing their dedication and eagerness to learn. These six, along with the crew at Northlake, spent 8 weeks with Adam Hester and me going through the program. We all got together and had a good time filming our FISH! video. Meg and Nikki helped put together a new style of service presentation that will be rolled out to the entire restaurant. All did a great job getting together and hosting a great meeting. During the training Matt and Scott were also promoted to the Key Employee position while going through the process. I look forward to working with this group in selecting another group of trainers and continually developing our current and future team members.—Tony Vitelli



As for great victories, Team SouthPark received the "Bird of Excellence" trophy for their victory in the "Grapes for Glory" wine contest! Ine Sirbu took home the in-house reward of \$100 for highest wine sales at SouthPark—Congratulations Ine! Also, in the spirit of celebration, Firebirds would like to congratulate SouthPark Corporate Trainer, Bradley Davis, on his recent engagement to former Firebird Lauren Bradshaw. The two love birds were recently engaged and will be married on March 27th in an island wedding in Jamaica!—Meg Clark and Nikki Davis



Best of the Best—by Mike Lieber

On Thursday July 30th, Firebirds Wilmington was invited to participate in the 21st annual Best of Delaware Party, as we were voted Best New Steakhouse by the critics of Delaware Today. This party was the premier event in which all of the winners from around the state come together to showcase their talents. Chef Wilson Trigueros, Team members Brittany Doyle, Tina Rodriguez, and Rich Cook joined me, 40 plus vendors and over 2000 guests to celebrate this honored event.

The party was not only about recognizing the best that Delaware has to offer, it also helped to raise money and awareness for 3 nonprofit organizations: Big Brothers, Big Sisters, Delaware Guidance Services and the Delaware Children's Museum. Firebirds served Lobster Spinach Queso martinis and Prime Rib sliders. We had a line the whole time with raving guests looking for seconds of our delicious samples. Nice job to Team Wilmington for a great night and it was our pleasure to participate in this year's event. We look forward to next year!



On Sept 21st, I had the pleasure of taking our newest group of Wilmington Certified Trainers out to dinner at the Brasserie Grill. This dinner was our celebration and recognition of their efforts during the certified training program that they all completed. We were able to sample some of our new wines, chat about the success and progress of our training and share some delicious food. A great time was had by all! Thank you Drew, Britt, Suzie, Matt, Janet, Christina and Allison for all your efforts with this program and I look forward to our future success!

Aces in Arizona—by Malori Heppler



To say that Josefina Lezama is invaluable is an understatement. For the last five years she has been an integral asset to our company, showcasing her efficient and productive work ethic. Her day starts at 4am when she crawls out of bed, tucks her black hair under her red cap, and heads into Firebirds Peoria to give the restaurant a good scrubbing.

After a couple of hours of single-handedly cleaning the bathrooms, floors and windows, she heads back to open the kitchen. She checks in produce trucks, pops the prime rib in the oven and helps get things started for us in the morning. She's a master on the grill, a whiz in prep and has a sharp tongue that all employees (front and back of house) respect. After a full, non-stop day, Josefina then heads home to care for her family of four. After a few hours of sleep, she's back at it again, refreshed and with a smile on her face.

With all of the hard work she puts in, it's only fair that Josefina gets to escape from the drone of her daily schedule. At the end of September she is taking a trip to Las Vegas with her husband. Our Management Team presented her with a "Las Vegas Survival Kit," containing items she may need on her trip such as, energy spray, a feather boa and a little extra spending cash. Although we will miss her for these few days, we hope that she wins big in Sin City!



Perhaps one of the best compliments we have received in Firebirds Chandler was a letter from a sweet 4th grade girl raving about her love for Firebirds and inquiring about the nuts and bolts of the restaurant biz. When MP Rita read the letter, she decided that a simple reply was not adequate. She invited 10 year old Heather Vanderloo for a "Day in the Life" on a Saturday evening to see firsthand what goes into running our restaurant, from washing dishes to working the floor.

After getting the full tour from Rita, she made her very own salad, ran food, and even made a table visit! During the slower part of the evening Heather taught Sous Chef Jake Vankooten a thing or two about baking cookies in the prep kitchen. Jake even commented that her mean egg-cracking skills showed promise for being a chef someday! After her experience at Firebirds, Heather determined that the restaurant industry may be her calling; whether it's running a restaurant, being a member of the service staff, or whipping up something delicious as a chef. If we are lucky, Heather may join us again in a few years, this time as a full-fledged member of the Firebirds Team!

