

## *Awards of Chamber Excellence*

### **2013 ENTREPRENEURS OF THE YEAR**

### **JOE AND MARY BARBERA, AIDA BISTRO AND WINE BAR**

AIDA Bistro & Wine Bar opened in Columbia 11 years ago, and built its current, more upscale location in 2010. But the inspiration for the restaurant took root a couple decades earlier when Joe and Mary Barbera enjoyed a trip through the California wine country on their honeymoon.

“We said one day we wanted to have a little corner wine bar,” Mary said.

After more than 20 years of rigorous traveling for his job doing sales and marketing with high-tech companies, Joe decided he was ready for a career that kept him closer to home. With help from their family, a name borrowed from Joe’s mother (Aida), and an entrepreneurial spirit, the Barberas built their dream into an award-winning location that is a favorite with local residents and visitors throughout the region.

AIDA Bistro specializes in Italian favorites -- including freshly made pasta -- and offers a variety of eclectic selections as well. The chefs use items locally produced by farms, wineries and other sources and change the menu regularly to reflect fresh food that is in season.

“I’ve been passionate about food and wine my whole life,” Joe said. “It is buried in the gene pool... the family is full of cooks.”

The restaurant is also a national leader in serving Wine On Tap. Their selection of 30 varieties is the largest on-tap offering in Maryland and the second-largest in the country.

The use of the tap system ensures that no oxygen reaches the wine until it is poured, protecting its quality and flavor, Joe explained. Plus, the process is environmentally friendly, with every reusable pressurized container saving 25 wine bottles, corks and labels and the accompanying packaging material.



Mary and Joe Barbera (third and fourth from right) accept their award from Miles Coffman of M&T Bank, Chamber Board Chair Greg Lowe of Lowe fs, and Pete Mangione of Turf Valley at the 2013 Signature Event on October 4.

Photo by Bittner Photography

The Barberas worked with other restaurateurs and lawmakers to pass legislation that allows customers to take home Wine On Tap in portable containers (nicknamed “growlers” in a play on the growlers used for beer). AIDA Bistro will be offering that option starting in October.

AIDA Bistro joined the Chamber of Commerce in 2010 to “get to know the very talented people we have in the community,” Joe said. He is a member of the executive committee of the Restaurant Association of Maryland and has served as a member of the Howard County Tourism Council’s Board of Directors, including as president in 2010 and 2011. He was instrumental in organizing the first Howard County Restaurant Weeks.

Joe and Mary are active members of St. Louis Parish in Clarksville and are committed to a number of charitable causes. Joe has been a member of the Columbia Classic Grand Prix Advisory Board since 2009. The couple has supported Hospice of Howard County and provided significant funds to the Claudia Mayer Cancer Resource Center through the Blossoms of Hope program.

Asked for his advice for other entrepreneurs, Joe said, “Show up every day.”

He added: “You have to stay connected to the community. ... For me it’s all about marketing, which is not the same as advertising. It is about how you are seen in the community. When people see you, they remember you, and then they come back.”

Learn more at [www.aidabistro.com](http://www.aidabistro.com).