

RESTORATION PIZZA: LIKE “WALKING INTO A HUG”

Restoration Pizza, a concept that opened in Albuquerque in 2019, has proven so successful that a second location—in Santa Fe’s Railyard District—is opening this fall. The restaurant’s motto is “Pizza that gives everyone a seat at the table.” An offshoot of the Albuquerque-based Bosque Brewing, “Resto” actively recruits and hires persons with disabilities for employment.



“It’s a place where anybody and everybody is welcome. We look at your abilities rather than disabilities, and do all that we can with your abilities,” Operations Manager **Nathan Winham** says. The idea sprouted from a non-work-related conversation Winham had with Bosque’s CEO **Gabe Jensen**. He had recently moved to Albuquerque from Arkansas and wanted to do something that would have a positive impact on his new hometown.

About 35 percent of the staff has a disability. “I feel like we accurately represent the public on every shift,” Winham says. “It’s not something we force. It’s just kind of how it all worked out.”

“It feels like you’re walking into a hug,” says **Audrey McCoy**, Recruiting and Experiences Manager. “That’s the experience we’re trying to create for both guests and employees. And we’ve been successful at it.”

McCoy says the community already knew Bosque and its values, so Restoration was a natural extension of what they stand for. With a background in special education, she enjoys being able to combine the two parts of her work life.



Staff members with disabilities have meaningful, gainful employment and earn competitive wages. “They’re working and supporting themselves. That is a plus for the community as well,” says Winham. But it’s not just a feel-good effort. “We are a for-profit business, don’t get me wrong. If we didn’t feel as though this was a successful business, we wouldn’t be looking to expand.”

They could do things differently and make more money, Winham says. “But then we’d just become another pizza and beer place.” He adds the legacy for families of people who otherwise wouldn’t be working is more important than a bottom-line number. **“This is an opportunity to impact the community—and our employee base—in a positive manner.”**

Adds McCoy, “It’s also really good pizza!”

Training might take a little longer than with new employees at other restaurants. Recipes are picture-centric to make it easier for all staff to prepare food in a systematic way. In the dining

room, table numbers are larger than average. “Those are things we can do to make learning easier for everyone,” Winham says. “We try to simplify things.”



Nathan Winham works with a Restoration Pizza team member

This business plan is rare in the United States. Winham only knows of a coffee shop in South Carolina and a brewery in Colorado that have a similar staffing model. But he encourages others to take the step. “It is difficult; I don’t want to candy-coat it. But it is worth the investment,” he advises. “Be open to knowing you can do something a different way to get the same result.

“The relationships that have been built within Resto, between able-bodied and differently abled, are friendships that are going to last forever,” Winham concludes.

###