

Friday, August 24, 2007

## The Met LLC

A steak in the business

Boston Business Journal - by [Naomi R. Kooker](#) Journal staff



W. Marc Bernsau

Kathy Sidell Trustman, owner and operator of The Metropolitan Club, is about to open a more casual version of her "modern" Chestnut Hill steakhouse. The Met Bar & Grill, along with the Met Burger Bar, is slated to open in the Natick Collection next month. [View Larger](#)

Kathy Sidell Trustman doesn't have a problem relinquishing control as a first-time restaurateur; it's learning not to take things personally that's been the challenge as owner and operator of The Metropolitan Club in Chestnut Hill.

For instance, when a chef left abruptly shortly after the restaurant opened, she at first was blind-sided. Then she realized something.

"The epiphany for me was, this concept was bigger than any single person," says Sidell Trustman. "You need to have faith in people you hire because you can't control everything."

Sidell Trustman is about to take what she calls another leap of faith and open a more casual version of her "modern" Chestnut Hill steakhouse. The Met Bar & Grill, along with the Met Burger Bar, is slated to open in the Natick Collection next month. In five years she wants nine fully operational stores nationwide -- a bold move for a former film producer who, at the age of 47, changed careers to open her first restaurant in November 2005.

The Metropolitan Club, known as The Met, became profitable in just 18 months, and it's on track to hit \$4 million in sales this year.

"She's identified a niche concept that she believes in and now has proof and a track record," said Peter Christie, president of the Massachusetts Restaurant Association.

Sidell Trustman says the second time around is "overwhelming," but is at the same time somewhat easier given the operational and financial systems already in place.

"It's more about creating a concept and getting it right," she says. "And you don't know if it's right until you open the door."

The new Natick location will be the template going forward. The 7,000-square-foot space will hold a 10-seat burger bar, specializing in different kinds of burgers. Hollywood-style booths will face an open kitchen in the dining room, which will seat about 200. A private dining area can be divided into several private spaces. There will be seating for 60 outdoors.

Todd Winer is the culinary director; Andrew Coleman, formerly at Bravo at the Museum of Fine Arts, will be the chef de cuisine at the Natick store.

From the get-go, Sidell Trustman wanted to reinvent what she deemed was a stuffy, cigar-smoking experience in traditional steakhouses to something more sexy and contemporary, bringing an urban feel to a suburban location.

Given her pedigree -- her dad is the pioneering restaurant financier James V. "Jack" Sidell, and her older sister, Stephanie Sokolove, owns Stephanie's on Newbury in the Back Bay -- one would think Sidell Trustman's experience would have been a cakewalk. It wasn't.

There was the chef snafu in the beginning, and she now faces the difficult task of raising money. She's already raised \$2 million to open Natick and will likely need to raise more to roll out other stores.

"Asking people for money is hard," she says.

There are about 10 investors in The Met LLC, the holding company that operates all the Met brands. She has a majority stake in the business while her personal and professional partner, Carl Goldberg, owner of CB Construction Co. in Dedham, has a minority slice. A staff of 40 runs the Chestnut Hill location; she said she'll need about 80 people to help run Natick.

"It's like making a movie," she says of running a restaurant. "You need people to appreciate and understand what you're doing."

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