

Front & Back of the House

Kitchen Provides Foodie Entrepreneurs with Options

By Gael Hees

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photos courtesy: Vida Kitchens

What would you do if you had access around the clock to a commercial kitchen, filled with professional ovens, stoves, smokers, slicers, refrigeration and a dish-washing area? Would you start a home delivery food service, or open a sandwich shop in a place with a great location but no room for a kitchen? Would you do catering on the side and keep your day job? Would you create high-end pet food for pampered dogs and cats?

All of these options and more are available to you right now at Vida Kitchens in North Las Vegas.

The facility is owned by Richard Zobrist and his son, Aaron. With 20-plus years of experience in the food distribution industry, they were seeking a space for their new enterprise, a USDA inspected sous-vide meat preparation company. They found a former grocery store that had more space than they needed so they created Vida Kitchens in May of 2017 and opened Vida Meats in November.

For a tour of the facility, one needs to contact Melissa Leavitt, who has served as the kitchen manager since the opening. She is there to help with everything from obtaining a health department license to managing any scheduling issues.

The kitchen itself is licensed as a commissary, but anyone using the kitchen is required to have a health permit of his or her own. "Everyone's operation is a bit different," said Leavitt. "I have some people who have licenses as caterers, other people as bakers, and others as restaurants."

At first, Leavitt didn't provide help with

obtaining the health department permits. However, that changed quickly. "One of the things I noticed was that people would come in, I would tell them all of the things they had to do with the health department and they would get really, really intimidated and I wouldn't hear back from them," she said.

She has now helped more than 70 individuals move through the permitting process. Leavitt provides applicants with the health department package, floor plans of the facility, and ensures that everyone applies for the license that best fits their needs.

The five work spaces include three to four stainless steel tables and access to all of the cooking equipment. Other options, based on the package purchased, include a license hanger service, shelving in the walk-in refrigerator, shelving in the upright freezer, a personal dry storage rack, trash cans with free liners and provided soap and sanitizer at the sinks and in the dishwashing room. Workspaces are available by the month (\$480 for 40 hours) and by the single event (\$20 an hour with a five hour minimum), with other options in between.

There are really only two main rules for kitchen users—be clean and be safe. Everyone is expected to leave the work stations and shared areas as clean or cleaner than they found them. About three or more times a week, one of the owners does a deep clean, attacking one of the ovens or changing the oil. Aside from a maintenance man who comes in a few times a week, the operation is covered by the owners and Leavitt.

As to safety—that really translates into security. Entry to the building is through the back, and

access is with an electronic key that is checked out to a specific individual. When the rollout door is used, it is required that it never be left unattended. "In addition to creating a safe food working environment, we want just a safe general environment that everyone feels good in," said Leavitt.

It is not often that all five cooking stations are in use at one time, though it certainly has happened. Because the kitchen is in a huge open space and all of the cooking equipment is shared, chefs must communicate with each other. "One of my favorite things about my job is when I peek out my little window and see the kitchen full of people talking to each other, asking questions, and sharing ideas," Leavitt said. "We look for people who want to work in a shared environment."

The two owners are truly entrepreneurs and want to help enable others who have a similar spirit. "I sometimes hear three or more ideas for new businesses in a day from my boss," said Leavitt.

The word vida (pronounced veeda) means life, and the tree of life is incorporated into the company's logo. According to Leavitt the Zobrists liked the name because they saw the kitchen as helping people grow. "We're in the business of keeping people in business," she said. "We're growing and innovating, looking for ways for us to make money, but also to have a place where other people can do that as well."

Vida Kitchens is located in North Las Vegas at 1370 W. Cheyenne Ave. For more info or to schedule a tour, call Melissa at 208-308-9892 or Aaron at 702-580-1638, email info@vidakitchens.com or visit vidakitchens.com.