

In Our House

Silverware clinks against dishes and light laughter circles the restaurant. Isabella and Jeff Morgia's local business, The Meatball Stoppe, grabs you by the hand and brings you right into an Italian home full of good food and great company. The "Wall of Fame," which is full of pictures of multiple generations of their family, boasts a rich heritage of warm and welcoming arms. Just past this wall is the Famiglia Room—"Famiglia" is Italian for "family"—a room where anyone can enjoy recipes from and inspired by the owners' families. You might be familiar with The Meatball Stoppe if you're a fan of Guy Fieri's "Diners, Drive-Ins, & Dives". Isabella was featured on the episode "Wonder Women," in which she and Jeff were able to share their passion for good food and family.





The Meatball Stoppe grew out of the Morgia's catering company, Isabella's Bella Cucina. When they began looking for a place to house their growing business, God provided more than they had anticipated. As they stood in their new space, Jeff said to Isabella, "What are we going to do with 1,200 square feet for a commercial kitchen? It's just us." The wheels in his head started to turn—what if they opened up a restaurant? "What do we have to lose? We're already paying for the space. You throw up a couple of walls. You put some paint on the walls, and you get a few tables and chairs. And that's literally what we did."

The Meatball Stoppe is as much a ministry of love as it is a restaurant. Isabella and Jeff's mission is "Famiglia and love all rolled up." They want to share their food with others and build relationships. "The food is the vehicle that we use," Isabella says. Early on, Jeff and Isabella hosted local children and their parents for home cooked meals at a local community center. After the event they sent families away with the ingredients to make the meal again at home. During the meals, Isabella spoke to the children, investing in them practical skills in the kitchen and also the importance of using their lives to make a difference. She emphasized that they have a choice with what they do with their lives. She also encouraged them to use their lives to help their families—both previous and future generations. "God gave us this opportunity," Isabella says. And she used the opportunity to inspire the kids to "become whatever it is that God wants you to become."

Isabella and Jeff want their guests to experience their meals like they're part of the family. They know that the secret to success is all rolled up in people and forming relationships. So, one way they now serve their community is by inviting others in for a meal.

"I said, 'Honey, let's take them out of where they are and bring them here,'" Isabella explains. They decided they want to serve by providing an experience. "Allow us to serve them. Let them feel like they are special. Treat them like Italian royalty," she continues, illuminating the why behind the invitations. The Morgias contacted Summit and other local churches, urging them to feel free to send people in need of encouragement to The Meatball Stoppe, to their table, so they can spoil them. "And I just put the word out," Isabella says. "If you have a family who's in need, ...a family who's having a hard time, or maybe it's a couple who haven't gone on a date in a while and could sure use a date night. You know, whatever it is. God put in our hearts—send them to us. We would love to serve them."



With the restaurant located close to Engelwood Elementary School, Jeff and Isabella decided to open their doors to these students as well. They consulted with school administrators and decided the best way for them to serve the school was to provide new incentives for good behavior. So, the best behaved classes were brought to The Meatball Stoppe for mouth watering meals—probably the amazing mac 'n' cheese meatball. "We filled up this whole Famiglia Room with the kids!" Isabella says. "They got all dressed up and it was so cute."

In addition to treating the guests like family, Jeff and Isabella are committed to loving their staff. They make sure they pay their staff well and give them holidays and every Sunday off work, but it's the day-to-day care that they effortlessly practice that makes the staff like family, too. "So

you know, like today, when I went to the store," Jeff says, "I bought four gallons of milk and I gave one to our prep girl. I said, 'You need milk at home?' She said, 'Yeah, I was gonna get some.' And I said, 'Take it.' ...And you know, we have our limitations within reason...but to me, that's where it's important. Because it's their everyday life."

back." Just like Jesus invited anyone to his table, everyone is invited to The Meatball Stoppe. It's about the food, but it's also about treating customers like they're guests in their home. It's about meeting others' needs personally. And it's about choosing to make people a priority. *



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