

MEMBER PROFILE

LORI VERSAVEL, CPA, CGA

OWNER/OPERATOR

COFFEE CULTURE CAFE & EATERY



Customers come and go from Coffee Culture Café & Eatery on Victoria Avenue in Brandon, Manitoba. Some stay, enjoying the sunshine on the outdoor patio or the comfortable restaurant-style seating area with rich, dark trappings. Others head back to their vehicle, order in hand. Regardless, nearly all of them are addressed by name and receive a familiar smile from owner/operator Lori Versavel, CPA, CGA.

Although you'd never be able to tell, Versavel is new to both entrepreneurship as well as the food and hospitality industry.

"I retired at 50 from a great job at the Western Medical Clinic in Brandon. Retirement was lovely. After a few relaxing years though, I just thought there was something else I should be doing," Versavel explains.

It was around that time that she and a group of friends were looking for a place to have a cup of coffee and catch up.



"We couldn't find anywhere that we liked and we ended up going to someone's house to have coffee in their backyard. While we were chatting, someone said that Hanover, Ontario has a great

place called Coffee Culture and that if there was one in Brandon, it would have been perfect to meet there," she recalls.

That's where the idea to open a business initially came from and it grew from there.

"Maybe I had too much time on my hands," Versavel admits with a laugh. "I spent the next few months researching the

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business and eventually got in touch with the master franchiser in Manitoba. It was a big decision and a large investment and took over a year to put together.”

Despite Coffee Culture being an unfamiliar brand to the city at the time—and Versavel conceding with a smile that her only other hands-on restaurant experience came from a Boston Pizza serving job when she was 18—Versavel opened Coffee Culture in July 2013.

"That was the culmination of a lot of hard work. It was tough and quite stressful at times. Looking back on it, I should have been

more nervous about what I was doing – especially since the brand was new. But it all worked out and I have learned so much from this experience.”

The process left a lasting impression on her and those who went through it together.

“One thing I didn’t realize is how bonded we would become as a team. I hired amazing people to help me launch the store and I couldn’t have done it without them or help from family and friends.”

With Coffee Culture in Brandon thriving as it approaches its fifth anniversary, it seems as though being a business owner

on a grand scale.”

After getting married to an engineer, the couple was looking for a place where both could work in their chosen fields.

“I gave him a list of all the engineering firms in Saskatoon and thought we would move there, but we ended up both finding opportunities in Brandon.”

Versavel regards that decision as one of the best the couple has ever made.

“I remember I was 31 years old when we moved and quickly it became clear that it was a fantastic decision. I love the City of Brandon. I love the people. There is just nothing not to like.”

It was in Brandon that she would find her first calling, a job that she would do for the next 17 years before ultimately retiring and opening Coffee Culture.

“I was hired as the administrator of the Western Medical Clinic which has 17 physicians in several locations. It was fantastic being part of such a smart team. I learned how to manage a downtown property and there was never a dull moment in that job. I remember thinking if I ever left, I would never find something that interesting and rewarding again.”

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was always meant to be. However, it was sort of by accident that Versavel’s accounting career eventually led her to entrepreneurship.

“I grew up in East Kildonan in Winnipeg and attended River East Collegiate before going to the University of Winnipeg Collegiate for grade 12. I loved horses, still do, and so after high school I enrolled in Equine Studies at what is now MacEwan University in Edmonton.”

While in Alberta, she worked during the summer for a family who kept horses at Spruce Meadows in Calgary.

“That summer I realized that I wasn’t a good enough rider to ever get a chance to work with the best horses and so I decided to try something new.”

Returning to Winnipeg, Versavel enrolled in a business course at Red River College.

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Versavel took a moment to reflect on her unique journey and some of the lessons she’s learned along the way.

“One thing that I noticed right away is that people take you more seriously when you have an accounting designation. It also gives you the confidence to make recommendations and have those recommendations carry weight. Even though I had no traditional entrepreneurial experience, the designation and the roles I was able to get with the help of the designation helped prepare me for owning my own business.”

She also has advice for those considering the designation. “If you want to have an interesting job, be well compensated and have the opportunity to work in any industry anywhere – become a CPA. Accounting is the backbone of every business and it teaches you to think strategically, which can be applied to virtually any other situation.”

Although working seven days a week and long hours is the complete opposite of retired life, Versavel says coming out of retirement to own and manage a business has had its rewards.

“Now my friends and I have a place to go for coffee,” Versavel says with a laugh before adding, “and I have the really nice horses I always wanted to ride.”



“After completing my classes I got a really great job at Investors Group where I was able to apply some of the things I had learned in school but I could tell that I needed more education. I ended up enrolling in an accounting designation program.”

After spending almost nine years at Investors Group, she was looking for a new challenge and found it as an Internal Auditor at Cargill.

“I ended up in the petroleum division and really learned a lot. I got experience in reporting, reconciliations and how accounting works