

Legacy And Love

An Interview with Jenna Ruggiero and Rosanna Scotto, Co-Owners, Fresco by Scotto

EDITORS' NOTE Jenna Ruggiero is a co-owner of Fresco by Scotto. She brings experience from previous roles at Luminous Management LLC, Clubhouse Life LLC, Lava Records and Rufus Wainwright. Ruggiero holds a certificate in Restaurant Revenue Management from Cornell University. Her robust skill set spans the music industry, public relations, studio recording, publicity, event management and more.

Rosanna Scotto is the host of Good Day New York. She has been a member of the Fox 5 News team since 1986. A four-time Emmy Award winner for anchoring and reporting for Good Day New York, she has been essential in the success of Fresco by Scotto and works at Fresco as "President of Schmoozing." She lives to eat, drink, and be merry at the family restaurant.

RESTAURANT BRIEF Fresco by Scotto restaurant (frescobyscotto.com) has been opened since November 1993. It's well known as the power broker's lunch and star-filled entertainment industry dinner. Fresco by Scotto is owned and operated by the Scotto Family, which includes Rosanna, Jenna, LJ, and Marion Scotto. Fresco by Scotto has received outstanding reviews in New York Magazine, Gourmet, and The New York Times, and three stars in Crain's New York Business. The Scotto Family has been seen demonstrating cooking segments on NBC's Today Show, Live with Regis & Kelly, The Ellen DeGeneres Show, Extra, The Wendy Williams Show, and Fox 5 Good Day New York.

Will you discuss the history of Fresco by Scotto and how you describe the restaurant?

Scotto: Fresco by Scotto started as my mother's dream in 1993, and we've poured our hearts into it ever since. It's not just a restaurant; it's an extension of our family, a place where we welcome guests like they're coming into our home. Through my eyes, Fresco is warm, vibrant, and full of life – a melting pot of amazing food, laughter, and memories.

Ruggiero: For me, Fresco represents legacy and love. Growing up around the restaurant, I've seen it evolve into something extraordinary. It's a mix of old-school hospitality with modern flair, a spot where everyone feels special, whether they're here for a quick bite or a celebration.

What has been the secret to the strength of the restaurant and its ability to build such a loyal clientele?



Jenna Ruggiero and Rosanna Scotto

Scotto: The secret is our connection to our customers. They know we're here, in the trenches, ensuring every meal and experience

is memorable. Our family's presence, combined with a consistent commitment to quality and service, has kept our guests coming back for over three decades.

Ruggiero: It's about relationships. We remember names, favorite dishes, and life moments. That personal touch, paired with consistently delicious food and a welcoming vibe, is what sets us apart.

How important is it to be innovative while maintaining a menu with traditional favorites?

Scotto: Striking that balance is critical. People come for their beloved Fresco classics like our potato and zucchini chips and Mama Scotto's meatballs, but they also want to be surprised. We keep things fresh by introducing seasonal dishes and modern twists, always staying true to our Italian roots.

Ruggiero: Innovation is key to staying relevant. We work hard to add creative elements to our food and beverage menus while keeping the staples that our loyal guests adore.



Fresco by Scotto restaurant on 52nd Street in Manhattan (above and opposite page)



How do you focus your efforts leading Fresco by Scotto?

Scotto: I'm hands-on with everything – from greeting guests to team meetings.

Ruggiero: I run the daily operations of the restaurant along with my brother, LJ Ruggiero. We're the ones focusing on guest experience, making sure everything runs smoothly, and that the food is coming out of the kitchen. Mom gets the asses in the seats! I collaborate with our Chef on ideas for the menu, programming for our special events, run all our marketing, and the list goes on. It's important for me to be present at every preshift and staff meeting. You can never take your eyes off the ball.

What have been the keys to attracting and retaining talent for the restaurant?

Scotto: Treating our staff like family. Many of our team members have been with us for years, and that says a lot about the culture we've built.

Ruggiero: It's about creating an environment where people feel valued and supported. Happy staff equals happy guests.

What has made the working relationship between the family work so well?

Scotto: Respect and clear communication. We all have our strengths, and we play to those. It's also about having fun – we don't take ourselves too seriously, and that keeps things balanced.

Ruggiero: We've found our rhythm by keeping the lines of communication open. Plus, there's a deep sense of trust – we know we're all working toward the same goal.

What are some of the top-selling menu items at the restaurant?

Scotto: Our Bolognese is consistently a top seller. Guests also love our pizza and Mama

Scotto's meatballs – classics that have stood the test of time.

Ruggiero: And don't forget dessert. Our homemade tiramisu and cheesecake are always a hit.

Will you highlight what you have implemented in terms of programming and entertainment?

Scotto: Jenna has been planning exciting themed nights, like wine dinners, a Tarot Card Night, and our Italian Carnevale event. It's about making every visit to Fresco feel like a unique experience.

Ruggiero: I'm very excited about the programming for our special events this year. We will be incorporating live music, special collaborations with artists, creative menus and festive decorations. In February we had Valentine's Day Weekend featuring one of NYC's most sought after singers, Storm Marrero. On February 14, Storm serenaded guests with her live jazz quartet, and the following day, Storm got our guests dancing on the tables when she accompanied our live DJ for a more fun night. We hosted Italian Carnevale on February 28, which was a masquerade night...and there are many more things to come. ●

