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## Promoting Customer Service Internally and Externally

### At Your Service' Spotlight: Serving up a dream in Casablanca



Rick's Café Casablanca is a ritzy restaurant, bar and café located in the city of Casablanca, Morocco. Opened March 1, 2004 by the late Kathy Kriger, an American diplomat, the place was designed to recreate the bar made famous by Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in the movie classic *Casablanca*. Set in an old courtyard-style mansion built against the walls of the Old Medina of Casablanca,

Rick's Café is filled with architectural and decorative details reminiscent of the film: curved arches, a sculpted bar, balconies, balustrades as well as beaded and stenciled brass lighting and plants that cast luminous shadows on white walls. A key focal point is an authentic 1930s Pleyel piano at which a pianist plays nightly, Tuesday through Sunday, a repertoire of standards reminiscent of the 1940s and '50s, including classic French, Spanish and Brazilian songs along with American favorites such as *Summertime*, *The Lady is a Tramp*, *Blue Moon* and the inevitable *As Time Goes By* (several times a night).

Issam Chabaa was the pianist on the opening night in 2004, and now he manages the restaurant, reporting to Kriger's son in New York. He said Kathy Kriger was the inspiration behind Rick's Café even though she originally had other partners in the business. "She was the only one fighting for it. It was not easy for an American woman alone to put all this together. She was the driving force, ideas, menus, the one leading the whole thing. I was the sidekick, bringing more technical stuff, artistic, on a different level."

Chabaa admits that customers don't necessarily come for the food. "They come for the theme. They come for the dream. It's a fantasy for some people. It means so much to them to be here. It still surprises me. But if they come back it means they like the food, they like the atmosphere. We're not the typical 'go to' place in Casablanca." He says for young people, the theme and the music is old, but they come to the restaurant for special occasions, attracted by the romanticism.

Chabaa says that he doesn't have an active communications or advertising strategy, but never refuses an opportunity for exposure. "But we always want it to be low key. We do have Facebook now so we post stuff about us, as well as live streaming of the music." Social media though does have its downsides, and the restaurant has received a number of negative posts from tourists who have been turned away at the door because they showed up in shorts and sandals. But Chabaa defends the dress code as a way to maintain the ambiance - and the illusion. "Some people get mad," he says. "They say, 'But these are \$200 designer jeans,' and I say, 'I'm sorry, but they're still torn jeans.' We try not to be too rigid, but if someone sits down wearing flip-flops and a t-shirt, we get complaints from other customers."

Chabaa says that the restaurant wasn't meant to be a precise replica of the movie set. "What is replicated is the spirit - we do our best to recreate what people would expect the atmosphere to be like. We also reinforce the theme by selling t-shirts, mugs, ash trays, martini glasses, books, all with Rick's Café on them. Of course, the café in the movie only sold beverages and caviar, so we started from scratch with the menu. In fact, the menu has been probably the most difficult part because it is a themed restaurant. If you like fish you go to a fish restaurant, if you want pizza you go to an Italian. But we have people from all over the world that come for different reasons, not the food. So our menu is quite conventional - quality food they can relate to, with a sprinkle of Moroccan flavors."