



## SUCCESS STORY #212:

# FOR THIS EUROPEAN RESTAURANT, SUCCESS IS SWEET

**Small Business Development Center  
hosted by El Camino College**

Dolce Vita Restaurant • Redondo Beach, CA

### Dolce Vita Restaurant

1718 S. Catalina Ave.  
Redondo Beach, CA 90277  
(310) 844-7462  
[www.dvgourmet.com](http://www.dvgourmet.com)



For more information or to sign up  
for a free consulting session,  
go to [www.southbaysbdc.org](http://www.southbaysbdc.org)  
or call (310) 973-3177.



Los Angeles Regional Network



The Lead Center for the Los Angeles Regional SBDC Network is operated by Long Beach Community College District. The Small Business Development Centers are funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration, center host institutions, state and local funds, and corporate partners. Funding is not an endorsement of any product, opinion, or service. All Federal and State funded programs are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Special arrangements for individuals with disability will be made if requested in advance.

### BEFORE:

When Melanie Strauss moved from Frankfurt, Germany, to the U.S. with her husband, Klaus Jaeger, she missed the European food and cheeses and German cakes of her native country. Unable to find a nearby location that sold them, she decided to launch her own restaurant and delicatessen to do so. Although Strauss had previously owned a high-end retail clothing business in Germany, she had no experience running a business in the United States, so she turned to the Small Business Development Center hosted by El Camino College for advice.

### BEST ADVICE:

At the SBDC, Strauss attended classes on choosing a company structure, creating a business plan, marketing on a budget, accounting, human resources and running a restaurant. "I took almost every class the SBDC offered!" says Strauss. She also met with SBDC Business Advisors one-on-one for advice on lease negotiations and employee regulations.

### LESSONS LEARNED:

- **Understand the rules.** "I knew how to open a business, but in a new country, regulations are totally different," Strauss explains. Business Advisor Dr. Barbara A. Sweet counseled Strauss on labor regulations, hiring practices, due diligence, appropriate interview questions, management practices and ways to motivate and retain employees.
- **Spread the word.** E-mail is key to Strauss' marketing strategy. She sends regular announcements to customers on her mailing list. The resulting word-of-mouth has been a huge factor in bringing in new business.
- **Be willing to learn.** Strauss took an SBDC class in running a restaurant, but she didn't stop there. She returned to Germany to work in a delicatessen so she could learn more about artisanal cheeses and baking German cakes; she also took professional cooking and baking courses in Los Angeles.

### AFTER:

Dolce Vita opened for business in June 2008 in the Riviera Village area of Redondo Beach. The combination delicatessen and bistro generates additional revenues by catering to businesses, travel agencies and international airlines.

Quickly earning rave reviews for menu items including sandwiches, salads, fresh desserts and charcuterie, Dolce Vita was voted one of the top 10 new restaurants in the South Bay. It has received kudos for its decadent desserts and has been featured in several local publications. The restaurant has also enjoyed steady business despite an economic downturn — thanks, in part, to the business basics Strauss learned from the SBDC. "I thought the SBDC training was such a great thing," she says. "[There's] nothing to lose, and [you] can get as much information as possible."