

Rotary
Club of
Charlotte



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

October 17, 2023

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Frank Scibelli
Founder, FS Food Group



Callie Langhorne
Callie Langhorne PR



Ted Williams
Author, AXIOS Charlotte

CLT's Food Scene Panel Discussion

by **Elly Clary**

Give people what they want and stay true to your identity was the recipe for culinary success offered by a restaurateur, a new media guru and a hospitality marketer.

Common sense guides him, Frank Scibelli, owner of Mama Ricotta's and other iconic Charlotte eateries, told Rotarians.

"We're not curing cancer. It's food service and atmosphere," he said. "If you do a great job in the restaurant, the business grows."

Alternative media operative Ted Williams agreed. "If the food is good, people will find out," he said. He emphasizes speaking to people conversationally about topics important to them, including smart places to eat.

Williams started the digital media outlet Charlotte Agenda in 2015. Axios bought it in 2020. Williams guided Axios to a presence in 30 U.S. cities. His media model is a mix of fun and serious material.

For dining information, consumer focus is key, he believes. People want to know where to find an outstanding appetizer or the location of a good first-date spot.

“Working together to build a positive image is what makes Charlotte special,” said Callie Langhorne, a marketer concentrating on restaurants.

“Charlotte’s a great hub for fitness, lifestyle, and hospitality,” elaborated Langhorne, who’s from Atlanta and promoted restaurants in Charleston before arriving in Queen City in 2017. She operates Callie Langhorne PR.

“What I liked most about Charlotte was its sense of community,” she said. “There’s more collaboration and inclusivity here. People put pressure on us to define who we are. We’re just Charlotte. I think we’re a great city.”

Scibelli, Williams, and Langhorne participated in a foodie-oriented panel discussion moderated by Charlotte Rotary President [Edwin Peacock](#).

Scibelli opened Mama Ricotta’s in 1992 with 39 seats. With a 250-capacity now, it’s still packing them in. Most popular menu items are chicken parmesan and penne alla vodka. “Penne alla vodka put my kids through college,” Scibelli chuckled.

Along the way, Scibelli created multiple other concepts such as Little Mama’s, Big Daddy’s Burger Bar, YAFO, and Midwood Smokehouse. Attracted to those entities have been personalities like Bob Dylan, Justin Timberlake, and President Barack Obama. His secrets to success: Top notch, fresh ingredients, and listening to diners. “Make food the public likes,” he said. He combines that with attention to budgeting and execution. “Watch your pennies,” and remember “it’s food service and atmosphere.”

What’s missing from Charlotte restaurant offerings? Indian food, Langhorne believes. Williams wants more Chinese. Scibelli expanded those suggestions with his answer: “Broader-appeal Asian.”

A recording of the meeting can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/875333953>
The panel introduction begins at approximately 15:45 minutes.