

## Iconic TV Journalist Rosanna Scotto and Her Children Reinvigorate Their Family-Owned Restaurant



If you don't know who Rosanna Scotto is, don't even think about trying to call yourself a New Yorker. You obviously flew in from Cleveland about a week and a half ago.

When it comes to New York-area TV journalists, Scotto is as iconic as it gets. She's been serving up local politics, celebrity news, human interest stories and everything in between, first on WABC then on FOX, since the early-1980s.

In 1982, Scotto joined WABC's *Good Morning New York*, the precursor to what would become *Live with Regis and Kathie Lee*. She soon moved to a more journalism-focused beat, joining WABC's *Eyewitness News* as a reporter. From there, she signed on at FOX, where she would become not just an anchor but an institution.

Five Emmy Awards for anchoring *FOX 5 News at 10* and *Good Day New York* followed, as did numerous awards for public service.

Brooklyn-born and steeped in the rhythms of the city she has so often reported on, Scotto remains firmly rooted in New York. But Hamptonites will also recognize the longtime East End homeowner as a familiar face in and around Southampton Village.

"We do love Southampton, but the vibe is, when you go into town, you have to look good," she says, smiling. "My mother always says to me, 'Just do me a favor. Can you at least put on lipstick?'"

In addition to serving as her daughter's fashion consultant, Scotto's mother Marion, the matriarch of the family, is the co-founder of *Fresco by Scotto*, a bastion of upscale traditional Italian fare on East 52nd Street in Midtown Manhattan.

Like Rosanna, *Fresco by Scotto* has become a New York institution in its own right since it opened in 1993 – a place for serious old-school food and A-list celebrity sightings in a lavish, yet always tasteful setting.



The Scottos will tell you that for the most part, their customers, whether they're power lunchers or pre-theater noshers, flock to Fresco for the classics: While the menu can certainly get creative and adventurous, Fresco's most popular offerings tend to gravitate toward comfortable dishes like Mama Scotto's Meatball with provolone and whipped ricotta, and Rigatoni Bolognese with a veal and chicken ragu, both of which have been among the most ordered items on the menu for three decades.

"Can I skip to dessert?" Rosanna asks, extolling the virtues of the Bomboloni, i.e., gluten-free, sugar-dusted Italian doughnuts served with warm caramel and vanilla bean dipping sauces.

Rosanna had long been involved with the family restaurant as a part-owner and, in essence, a silent partner. But as her mother and other family members stepped back from the business, Rosanna stepped up.

In addition to her full-time TV broadcast gig, Rosanna now runs Fresco by Scotto with her son and daughter, LJ and Jenna Ruggiero, both of whom serve as operational partners and co-manage day-to-day affairs at the eatery.

"LJ and Jenna are bringing fresh ideas and a fresh perspective to the restaurant," Scotto says. "And you'll also see me there a lot more now because my son will tell you that I can't help but put my two cents in."

"The way we operate is that if I have an idea, I always run it by my mom first," LJ Ruggiero says. "She always knows what's going on and she's always giving us great ideas to keep the restaurant vibrant and alive."

A confluence of events, including Marion Scotto pulling back from front-of-the-house operations and of course, the difficult-to-navigate uncertainties of the post-pandemic restaurant landscape, have forced Rosanna and her family to adapt.

"We've had to re-invent," Scotto says, noting that the restaurant has brought in a well-known party planner and begun focusing more on special events and theme nights with live music and dancing.

"We not only serve terrific, authentic Italian food," Scotto says. "We think up these fun ideas as a reminder to our customers to come back and be part of the community."

"We're also going to do a Saturday brunch to try to entice more people my age to come to Midtown," adds Ruggiero, "We're looking to have kind of a Fresco brunch with things like mimosas, Aperol spritzes and pizza balls. And we'll have a live DJ to get people dancing, drinking and having a great time."

Ruggiero points out that while engaging young people is one key to building on Fresco by Scotto's success, the older generation still has a part to play.

"There are kids around my age – I'm 31 – who come to Fresco on the weekends," he says. "But the first people to get up and dance and get the party started are my mother's age. Then the kids my age follow suit."

Over the last six months, Fresco has also begun actively booking catering gigs, another first for the family. At this point, the catering business is almost entirely New York City-based, but Ruggiero allows that he's at least somewhat open to the idea of expanding to the East End.

"If someone called and said, 'Hey, I want you to cater my party in the Hamptons this weekend,' I'd find a way to make it work," he says. "For the last 32 years, my family has never said no to our customers. We always do what's right for them."

If the catering business could theoretically be expanded to the Hamptons, have Rosanna and her family given any thought to following in the footsteps of many of their fellow New York restaurateurs and opening a second brick-and-mortar location out east?

"I'm not closing the door on it," Rosanna says. "It's partially open, but I definitely haven't walked through it yet."

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