



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

# A Family Affair

*The Armenia Group*

**John (left) and Joe Armenia are building a growing business.**

Innovative, with an entrepreneurial spirit. That not only explains what The Armenia Group offers as a business, but also describes the essence of the two men who head up the company, father and son John and Joe Armenia.

The two have worked side by side for

the past few years to come up with distinctive living environments such as Riva Del Lago, an upscale residential tower taking shape adjacent to Lakes Park in Ft. Myers. One of their most recent endeavors, an upscale gourmet market called Andrea's Gourmet Market and

Delicatessen, is the latest joint venture by John Armenia and Andrea Mucciga. The two started working together about 15 years ago by opening the former Bellini's on Captiva. Since then, they have partnered to open Riviera restaurant in 1996, Dolce Vita restaurant in 2000, and are



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now focusing on the gourmet market, which is opening this summer in front of their offices at 2430 Periwinkle Way on Sanibel Island.

“I think this is very much needed,” says son Joe Armenia. Island residents and visitors don’t always want to go out to dinner, so Andrea’s will provide them with great food that’s easy to prepare, he explains. Joe also sees catering and a delivery service in the not-so-distant future for Andrea’s.

He’s like his father that way—in seeing potential for future projects. They’re

until he came into the picture. “That’s transformation,” he says, showing a brochure picture of the final product in 1983 when it was opened as a Hilton. Now it’s known as The Sanibel Inn.

From there, John Armenia moved on to high-end condos, and then the eighty acres that became Sanibel Harbour Resort. “You have to imagine, at that time there was no Registry or Ritz. We were probably the first to create serious corporate meeting space,” he says of the Sanibel Harbour Resort project.

The Armenia Group’s specialty, they



Sanibel Harbour Resort and Spa is one of the projects The Armenia Group was involved in developing.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARMENIA GROUP

both full of ideas and bursting with energy to make them happen.

The Armenia Group, known as a creator of fine-living environments and epicurean experiences for the past two and a half decades, has been behind many elegant and upscale locations, such as Sanibel Harbour Resort and Spa, the former Sanibel Hilton Inn, as well as the restaurants.

A general contractor and real estate developer in New York City, John Armenia came to Sanibel and Captiva in 1979. He moved his wife and two children to sunny Southwest Florida to bring his new ideas to life.

It started simply, with a Best Western in 1982. John Armenia speaks of that first project fondly, pulling out scrapbooks of before-and-after pictures and explaining how dated the place looked

say, is really interior design and landscaping—aesthetics.

“We’re into creating lifestyles,” adds Joe. “We’re always trying to find the cutting edge.”

“It’s about a lifestyle of convenience, yet with amenities,” John adds.

The father-and-son duo seems to work well. Sometimes one finishes the other’s sentence, other times they take turns sitting back and listening.

John Armenia says he always knew his son would end up in his business; he just wasn’t sure when it would be.

“I was always overhearing meetings,” Joe says of his childhood. But he didn’t decide to go right into the company. After high school he went to the University of Florida, then got his MBA at Pennsylvania State University, and ended up at Ernst & Young in New York.



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At that point, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do, the 30-year-old says. "I loved my job and New York City." But something kept pulling at his heartstrings. Maybe it was the memory of sunny Southwest Florida beckoning his return or the laid-back island atmosphere he grew up in.

But that was only part of it. "I had that entrepreneurial upbringing....I had the fever," Joe says with a laugh. "I dragged my wife down here to my parents' house on Captiva," and the rest is history.

"He's become an integral part of the company," says his father.

The Armenias are following a path to success blazed by the previous generation. "My grandfathers were best friends and came over from Italy," Joe explains proudly.

Both men passed a strong work ethic along to his father as well as his mother, Lucy, who has had her hand in The Armenia Group, too. "She's been a key role almost since inception," says Joe Armenia.

His sister, Kristin, chose a different path; she's in Los Angeles pursuing an acting career. But Joe's wife, Monet, might become part of the family business at some point. "We could really use her talents," Joe says.

His father doesn't dwell on the Armenia connection, though; the name is not a requirement to join the team. "We have a lot of good people," says John. A stellar staff and others in the community have helped make Armenia a name to depend on, he notes.

What does the future hold? John contemplates that a moment.

"In the past it's been more entrepreneurial rather than growing the company. Now we're branding and taking the track record and expanding," he says. The Armenia Group has shown longevity and quality over the years that will take the company into the next decade and beyond.

He has some personal plans, too. "Hopefully, I will be fishing," he says, flashing a sly smile—and spoiling a grandchild that's on its way. Joe and Monet's baby is due in September.

Looks like the Armenia name will be around at least one more generation. 🐾

*J.G. Samuels is a freelance writer who lives in Bonita Springs.*