



GENERAL SESSION 2
TUESDAY DECEMBER 6, 2011
10:45AM-12:00PM
“Keeping Your Brand Vibrant”
Ingrid Croce, Croce’s Restaurant

Ingrid Croce Bio:

An indomitable spirit and unmatched drive have fueled Ingrid Croce’s success in and efforts on behalf of the San Diego region. A veteran musician and performer, she is no stranger to the spotlight and, since moving beyond the stage, her determination and versatility have allowed her to excel in a number of diverse arenas. No challenge is too big and no goal beyond the grasp of this self-made entrepreneur, restaurateur, author, publisher and philanthropist.

RESTAURATEUR & ADVOCATE FOR SAN DIEGO

A hard-working businesswoman, Ingrid is widely credited with leading the revitalization of the City’s historic Gaslamp Quarter. Today, the Gaslamp is regarded as the gem of Downtown San Diego, but when Ingrid first toured the area in the early-1970’s it was hardly a diamond in the rough. Run-down, dirty and teeming with unsavory characters (not unlike “Bad, Bad Leroy Brown”), there was little to foster the belief that a mighty phoenix could someday rise from such gritty ashes. However, Ingrid saw the Gaslamp’s potential and in 1985, she opened Croce’s Restaurant & Jazz Bar as a tribute to her late husband, musician Jim Croce.

From the beginning, Ingrid’s vision and values have been at the core of the Croce’s brand. Croce’s Restaurant & Jazz Bar provided the first viable fine dining and live music option for visitors to the Gaslamp, of which there were few in the venue’s early days. Determined to expose people to Downtown San Diego at its best, Ingrid opened Croce’s Coffee House that same year at Horton Plaza, a grand scale shopping center popular among San Diegans and tourists alike. Each day, she would invite patrons at her satellite venue to join her at Croce’s Restaurant & Jazz Bar, expounding the virtues of fine dining and live music in the Gaslamp and walking them personally back to Croce’s. In 1987, Ingrid and her husband, Jim Rock expanded the Croce’s empire, opening Croce’s Top Hat Bar & Grille, Ingrid’s Cantina and Upstairs at Croce’s (for group sales and catering) to offer diverse dining and entertainment options for visitors, conventioners and locals alike.

It took a lot of work, and even a little convincing, but word spread and before long customers and businesses began to fill out the Gaslamp. Today, there are hundreds of restaurants, bars, hotels and businesses located in the Gaslamp and Croce’s remains at the heart of it all. People come from far and wide to experience “The Croce’s Experience” – fresh contemporary American cuisine, welcoming service and live music. ***IT’S A LOFTY LEVEL OF EXCELLENCE TWENTY-FOUR YEARS IN THE MAKING THAT, LIKE INGRID, SHOWS ZERO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN ANY TIME SOON.***

In 2004, Ingrid’s determination to build San Diego as a top tier dining destination led her to launch the most successful dining event in the city’s history – *San Diego Restaurant Week*. Now in its fifth year, the event draws 250,000 guests to 150 restaurants twice a year. Ingrid continues as *San Diego Restaurant Week’s* fearless leader and recently produced a television program pilot titled *The Restaurant Week Travel Show*.

BUSINESS & ARTISTIC VENTURES

Ingrid is the owner and driving force behind Avalanche Records and Books, which has spawned *The San Diego Restaurant Cookbook* and a photographic memoir titled *Time In A Bottle*. Ingrid authored both works as well as *Thyme In A Bottle*, an autobiographical cookbook that was originally published by Harper Collins and is now in its third edition under Avalanche Records and Books. Ingrid co-produced a VH1 *Behind The Music* special on Jim Croce and TNN’s *The Jim Croce Life & Times*. She also produced the first ever DVD of Jim Croce titled *Have You Heard Jim Croce Live*, three CDs – *Jim Croce, Home Recordings, Americana; Facets*; and *Have You Heard Jim Croce Live* – all of which were released by the Croce Music Group (www.croces.com).

COMMUNITY

The community is Ingrid’s passion and she devotes a great deal of time to assisting others. She received the City of Hope’s Spirit of Life Award, works annually with the Emilio Nares Foundation and contributes to art programs via the Center for Community Solutions. She produced *A Celebration of Women Chefs*, benefitting Rachel’s Women’s Center, helped develop a Food Service, Hospitality and Tourism curriculum for the San Diego Unified School District and Mesa College as part of San Diego City College’s Business Roundtable for Education and co-founded Croce, Rock, Nelson Productions to raise money for community AIDS organizations. She also awards musical scholarships to performers devoted to keeping live music alive.

AWARDS

Restaurateur of the Year
California Restaurant Association, San Diego Chapter

National Pacesetter Award
Roundtable for Women

Pioneer Award [two-time winner]
Downtown Business Association

San Diego Business Hall of Fame
Junior Achievement

Spirit of Life Award
City of Hope

President’s Award
San Diego Convention & Visitor’s Bureau

TELEVISION PRODUCTIONS

QVC, 1996 – 1998
Celebrity Chef, Author, “Book and the Cook” Spokesperson

Food Network, 1997 & 1998
“Chef du Jour”

NBC, 2006
“The Today Show”

PBS, 2006
“The Legacy of Jim Croce”
“The Soul of Food and Music”

TNN, 2006
“Jim Croce Life & Times”

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

City of Hope
Emilio Nares Foundation
Center for Community Solutions
Rachel’s Women’s Center
San Diego City College
Business Roundtable For Education

BUSINESS AFFILIATIONS

California Restaurant Association, San Diego Chapter
Board Member
Education Committee Chair
Public Relations Committee Chair
San Diego Restaurant Week Committee Chair
Newsletter Editor In Chief

San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau
Board Member

Gaslamp Foundation & Council
Board Member

The Museum of Making Music
Board Member