

Visions of MAGNIFICENCE

Domini Baldasaro knew she wanted to work at the Walper Hotel when she was just a teenager. Now, as general manager, she plays a role in making it the special place it is today

BY CHERRI GREENO
PHOTOGRAPHY • TOMASZ ADAMSKI

When she was a young girl, Domini Baldasaro used to walk along the corner of King and Queen streets in downtown Kitchener and plant her feet firmly outside the Walper Hotel.

She would put her head up to the window, peer inside and watch guests come and go.

She would study the movements of the bellhops, donning their impressive cloaks and caps while sweeping the sidewalk.

She was mesmerized by the Red Hat Society ladies, who wore the most beautiful red hats while chatting and sipping tea.

As a teenager, she began to imagine what it would be like to work at such a magnificent place. To her, this building was magical.

“I just thought, ‘That’s an important and special place,’” she says. “I knew it by the curve of the street, by the colour of the brick and the sparkle of the huge windows. For all I knew, it was the only hotel in Kitchener. Hotel brand names didn’t mean anything to me at that age, but the Walper name did.”

One day, as she walked along with her mother, she declared, “I am going to work here one day.”

She wasn’t lying.

Today, 29-year-old Baldasaro is the

general manager of the Walper Hotel, which was built in 1893 and is considered one of the region’s most historic and grandest buildings.

Currently, Baldasaro is helping to oversee the multimillion-dollar renovations that are underway and due to be completed at the end of the summer.

“I have loved the Walper from a very young age,” she says. “My heart was in it before I even started working here.”

Her career with the Walper began in 2010 as she was completing her undergraduate degree in English at the University of Waterloo’s St. Jerome’s University. She had just come back from Alberta, where she received some experience working in the hospitality industry. Armed with that experience and a determination to turn her dream into a reality, she dropped off her resumé at the Walper Hotel.

Not long after, she was offered a job working at the front desk and was soon promoted to executive assistant, then front desk manager and then assistant manager.

From her first day, she says she “got to see just how special the Walper was to this area.”

“The guests have a great level of appreciation for this hotel,” she says. “This is a city that isn’t so tourist-heavy, so you get a rare opportunity to interact with almost everyone who comes through the doors.



People get an authentic experience when they come here.”

Still, she admits, when she first stepped foot inside the Walper as an employee, she was a bit disappointed.

“We had this grand old hotel that was just marvellous,” she says. “But the guest rooms had holes in the carpet and the walls were yellow and orange and we didn’t have enough televisions for the rooms. I remember thinking, ‘This is not what I imagined.’ But I knew at that time we would get there.”

When the hotel sold in 2013, the vision she had back then started to take shape, with the new owners looking to market the building as a unique, boutique experience that combined modern building

technology with many of the building’s historical features.

Massive renovations soon began to take place in the main lobby and in the event spaces on the second floor, including the Crystal Ballroom, the Barrister’s Lounge and the Oak Room.

Extensive renovations also began on the third, fourth and fifth floors of the 92-room hotel.

Baldasaro was named general manager and put in charge of hotel operations, sales and marketing and guest interaction.

Craig Beattie, partner with Perimeter Development, which is renovating the hotel, says he is thrilled with the work Baldasaro is doing.

“She embodies the overall vision we have for the hotel,” he says. “Her infec-

tious passion, vision and enthusiasm are intangible attributes that we want all of our team members to possess as we restore the Walper to the vibrant community hub that it once was.”

What makes Baldasaro a perfect fit for the new vision of the Walper is that she has a “unique perspective and appreciation for the great history of the hotel but also a clear understanding of the exciting changes and progress happening in the community and the Walper’s role in contributing and helping shape that change,” Beattie says.

For Baldasaro, being part of a team that shares the same vision that she had years ago is almost too good to be true.

“This building stands for so much for our region and I will be part of the team that

knocks it off its laurels, with all due respect to its historical roots, to launch it into a new era of boutique cool and raise the bar for the guest experience in our region,” she says.

The team at the Walper work together, she adds, to “bring energy to the hotel” and are busy gearing up for the end of summer, when they will greet their first guests.

“Today, the Walper is a constant reminder of the immeasurable return on investment of hard work and the human capacity to make dreams a reality,” she says. “I am grateful that the gut instincts of my nine-year-old self were spot on because I know now, with certainty, how special this hotel truly is. We are finally going to where I imagined it in my mind — only a million times better.”