



# Valerie Forsyth

Cocoa Beach, Florida



Epic Burrito

## *Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Valerie Forsyth:*

In 1997, Valerie Forsyth and her husband relocated to Brevard County from New York. As certified building contractors, this dynamic duo owned a construction company that operated throughout the tri-state area. Having spent her summers in Cocoa Beach, Valerie fell in love with the area and, when the opportunity presented itself, she and her husband packed up and moved their business to the Sunshine State.

Even though their construction business is still alive and well, Valerie pursued several different ventures before ultimately focusing on Epic Burrito.

“In 2009, my mom was diagnosed with dementia,” she said. “My good friend, Tracey Harrison, was also dealing with her mom who was ill. We looked at several different Assisted Living Facilities and didn’t like what

we had to choose from. In 2009, we took matters into our own hands and opened our own ALF called Magnolia House.”

In September of 2013, one of their residents passed away and, as a thank you for caring for her mother, the daughter bought Valerie and Tracey a spa treatment. On the way to the spa, they stopped at Chipotle for lunch. While sitting there eating their burritos, they were suddenly struck with an idea.

“We looked at each other and said, ‘We need something like this in Cocoa Beach’,” Valerie said. “After our massages, we drove by a commercial building we both thought would be the perfect place for a similar concept. We contacted the owner of the building and, two hours later, we signed a lease.”

Several months later, in March of 2014, Valerie and Tracey celebrated the grand opening of Epic Burrito. They had an idea and pursued it with unrelenting focus and determination. This included working through a few challenges and simultaneously running the ALF for one year, before they sold it in 2015.

“Since we’re in the construction business, the build-out wasn’t very difficult,” she said. “However, figuring out how to go after certain demographics has been challenging. Cocoa Beach has a real mix of tourists, snowbirds and locals. Developing the snowbird market has been a work in progress. We want to be able to capture a wider audience. We’re also looking to expand our menu. Some of the feedback has been that our menu is too small. We’re also looking at expanding our menu to include breakfast.”

Valerie shared that what she enjoys most about owning and running her own business is meeting new people, providing them with a great meal and helping them experience the best of Cocoa Beach. She believes in helping other small businesses and loves the small-town community vibe in Cocoa Beach.

Looking ahead, Valerie is toying with the idea of turning the business into a franchise. She's doing her homework on that, including space and seating requirements, but would likely start with a couple more locations that she would manage. Because of the minimal investment required, she's even considering a franchising food truck model.

What advice does Valerie have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "If you feel strongly about something, go for it," she said. "Life is short. If you do take the plunge, make sure you have a nest egg. Don't risk being out on the street for your idea. Also, get help from other entrepreneurs and ask a lot of questions. Most are happy to give advice. Use as many resources as you can, including the Chamber of Commerce. It's important to keep in mind that there will be ups and downs. When the recession hit, we had to declare bankruptcy. We lost a home and had to rebuild. It's been a roller coaster, but if you don't take a chance, you'll never know. Lastly, have a good balance between family, business and taking the time to enjoy life. Don't let your business rule you. Some people get so absorbed in their business. It's crucial to have a balance."

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