

Six to be inducted tonight into Montville High School Hall of Fame

Owner of Encore Catering among inductees at Montville High School, NJ

By **MATT MANOCHIO • STAFF WRITER** • October 15, 2010

MONTVILLE — Lisa Epstein knew early that she wasn't learning things in school the way her classmates did.

"When I was 9 years old, in the fifth grade, I vividly remember it like it was yesterday," the township resident said Thursday. "I was asked to re-read what I just read."

She couldn't.

The teacher picked up on a problem, consulted her family and had Epstein, now 44, take various tests. She later learned she was dyslexic and had attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

None of that prevented her from creating Encore Catering, which is based in East Hanover and bringing in \$4 million a year, she said. And it's her perseverance that earned her a place in the Montville High School Hall of Fame.

During a sold-out banquet tonight at the Lake Valhalla Club, Epstein will be one of six graduates honored for their accomplishments with induction into the school's Hall of Fame.

"I went to culinary school five years out of high school because I was kind of lost five years out of high school," said Epstein, who graduated in 1984. "I knew I wanted to run my own business and be my own boss."

Epstein worked to save up enough money to buy a "very, very small" catering business for \$30,000 in Madison in 1993.

"I was there for two years," she said. "Every single day I cried. I wanted to sell the business because it was too tough. But I pushed through it."

Her persistence and hard work enabled her to buy a commercial kitchen in Morristown for \$15,000. She now had more room to work in, and set a goal for herself: she would move to an even large facility in either five years or when she did \$1 million in sales for the year, whichever came first. Both happened at the same time.

She moved into a 7,500-square-foot facility in East Hanover three years ago. She employs roughly 135 full- and part-time employees.

"The hardest part about it was just learning how to run a business without any business knowledge, without any real cooking skills beside culinary school, having to teach myself how to do everything," she said.

Joe Quade, a Montville High School Hall of Fame committeeman, said in addition to Epstein, the following graduates also will be honored: Frank Cooney, a township policeman and business owner, Karen Carnegie, a television art illustrator, John Fea, a history professor at Messiah College, Patricia O'Dowd-Donohue, a New Jersey deputy attorney general, and Dr. Samir Shah, a diagnostic radiologist.

Richard Dewey Slayton, a retired guidance director and high school employee for 37 years will be honored, as will the 1983 girls field hockey team, which won the state championship.

Fred Eckhardt and John Petrozzino, two longtime members of the committee who recently passed away, will be recognized as well.

The inductees will join roughly 100 other classmates and educators who've been inducted in the hall since its first ceremony in 2001.



Lisa Epstein, 44, of Montville, is one of 6 student inductees into the Montville Hall of Fame. (Photo courtesy of Lisa Epstein)