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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**CONTACT:**

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Representing: Mike Isabella Concepts (“MIC”), its related entities and its individual owners.

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**Response on behalf of MIC:**

The allegations of an unwelcoming or hostile work atmosphere at MIC are false. The allegations come from a former employee, who is also a co-owner of the MIC enterprise. After years of working for MIC and never before raising these allegations, in December of 2017, she stormed off the job and refused to return, insisting she had been fired. This was after she and Mr. Isabella became involved in a verbal argument at one of the restaurants. Despite calls from management and HR for her to return to work, she flatly refused to do so. At that point, MIC felt she had quit. Ms. Caras then made an unemployment claim and afterwards, through her attorney, she presented these never-before-raised allegations of sexual harassment.

These allegations, coming from this single disgruntled co-owner of the company, are supported only by several former employees, all of whom are also her friends. In response to this story, we provided the Washington Post with the contact information of four of our top women-leaders at MIC who were willing to go on the record to refute her allegations. The Washington Post story only named two of our leaders, but more importantly, all of MIC’s staff, everyone from servers to managers, can attest to the fact that the allegations of a hostile working environment towards women are completely untrue.

In regards to the two allegations of physical contact, the allegation that Ms. Caras’ hair was pulled and a sexual act was simulated in her presence, and the allegation that Mr. Isabella gave an unwanted kiss to Ms. Hancock; MIC wants to make it very clear that these accusations are completely untrue. Not only are these allegations unsupported by any evidence, but countless MIC employees can confirm that these types of behaviors simply do not occur at the restaurants.

Ms. Caras was a friend of Mr. Isabella for many years. She worked and socialized with the management team, including all of the individuals named in her lawsuit. They all had “group chats” and similar means of talking together, both during work and on their personal time. Ms. Caras now claims that the “chats” that she engaged in for several years, all of which were private communications between her and the other MIC owners, created a hostile working environment towards women employees. Again, however, all of the women-leaders at MIC dispute this and moreover, Ms. Caras was a manager and co-owner herself, so her claims simply defy logic.

MIC is proud to be a vibrant and diverse place to work. Over 60% of MIC’s top management and leadership personnel are women, so Ms. Caras’ allegation that “women generally do not make it into the higher management ranks” is provably false. Mr. Isabella personally mentored and promoted Ms. Caras to run MIC’s boldest venture, the 41,000 square-foot Isabella Eatery. After Ms. Caras left, and before these allegations were made, another female was promoted to manage this coveted and important position.

As with any case of former business partners and employees, there is much more to this story. Ms. Caras engaged in the very same banter, language, and horseplay that she now claims created a hostile working atmosphere. MIC has the same, if not many more, of these text messages, incidents, and write-ups of serious misconduct at work, to show that Ms. Caras’ portrayal as a victim is, again, untrue. More importantly, she is using much of the communication that occurred off-work to support her own case, all the while the many employees and women-leaders at MIC are ready to prove that none of this occurred at the restaurants, and further that Mr. Isabella’s restaurants are enjoyable places to work and dine for everyone.

Harassment, discrimination, bullying, abuse, or unequal treatment of any kind whatsoever are not tolerated at MIC. As a manager and co-owner herself, Ms. Caras was responsible for enforcing these policies. MIC is prepared to litigate these issues in the public forum and to bring out all of the detailed text messages and communications, as Ms. Caras filed this lawsuit only after MIC refused to meet her financial demands over the course of the past several weeks.

Unprofessional words and profanity have been customary and historically acceptable in the restaurant industry, promoted by social media and popular television shows. Mr. Isabella and his partners regrets this and has recognized the need for change. This is why Mr. Isabella hired a dedicated Human Resources Director in 2017 as MIC grew and made other policy changes long before Ms. Caras threatened to bring her lawsuit. Mr. Isabella will not be deterred by Ms. Caras’ claims and will continue to be a stalwart of positive transition in the culinary industry. More importantly, all members of the MIC team, including everyone from servers to managers, can and will attest to the positive working environment and the opportunity Mr. Isabella provides to everyone who is willing to work hard and shares his vision for the Washington, D.C. restaurant industry.

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