

# No beans about it, cafe owner serious about coffee

At Fuego, Renee Colon and husband appreciate brew's complexity of flavor

By **KERRY FELTNER**

**S**he went from drinking gas station cappuccinos as a teen to talking to growers in Guatemala about their coffee-growing process as a business owner.

Renee Colon knows the difference between good and bad coffee.

Today she and her husband Tony co-own Fuego Coffee Roasters, a wholesale roastery and cafe.

The spouses are making their mark on the Rochester coffee scene, one cup at a time.

"I love how complex coffee is from start to finish," she says. "From the soil it's grown in, to how it's picked, how it's dried, how it's cleaned, how it's sorted, how it's roasted—all before it's even being prepared affects everything. It's so incredibly chemically complex. The only other thing that is as chemically complex is wine."

Roasting coffee has become a passion for Colon. The process is inherently creative, she said.



"I absolutely love roasting coffee," says Renee Colon, co-owner with her husband, Tony, of Fuego Coffee Roasters on Euclid Avenue downtown. "It's like legitimate therapy for me."

Photo by Kate Melton

Continued on page 7

## 2017 Business Person of the Year Gala Luncheon



### Celebrating Business Success

The Small Business Council of Rochester will host its annual Gala Luncheon – one of the region's largest business networking events – to recognize exceptional business leaders who have demonstrated significant contributions to their companies in the areas of growth, leadership, achievement and community service.

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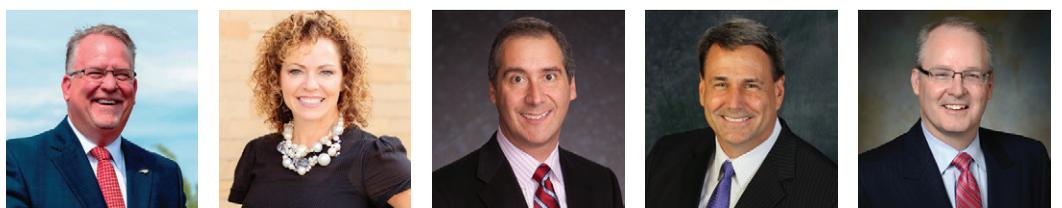
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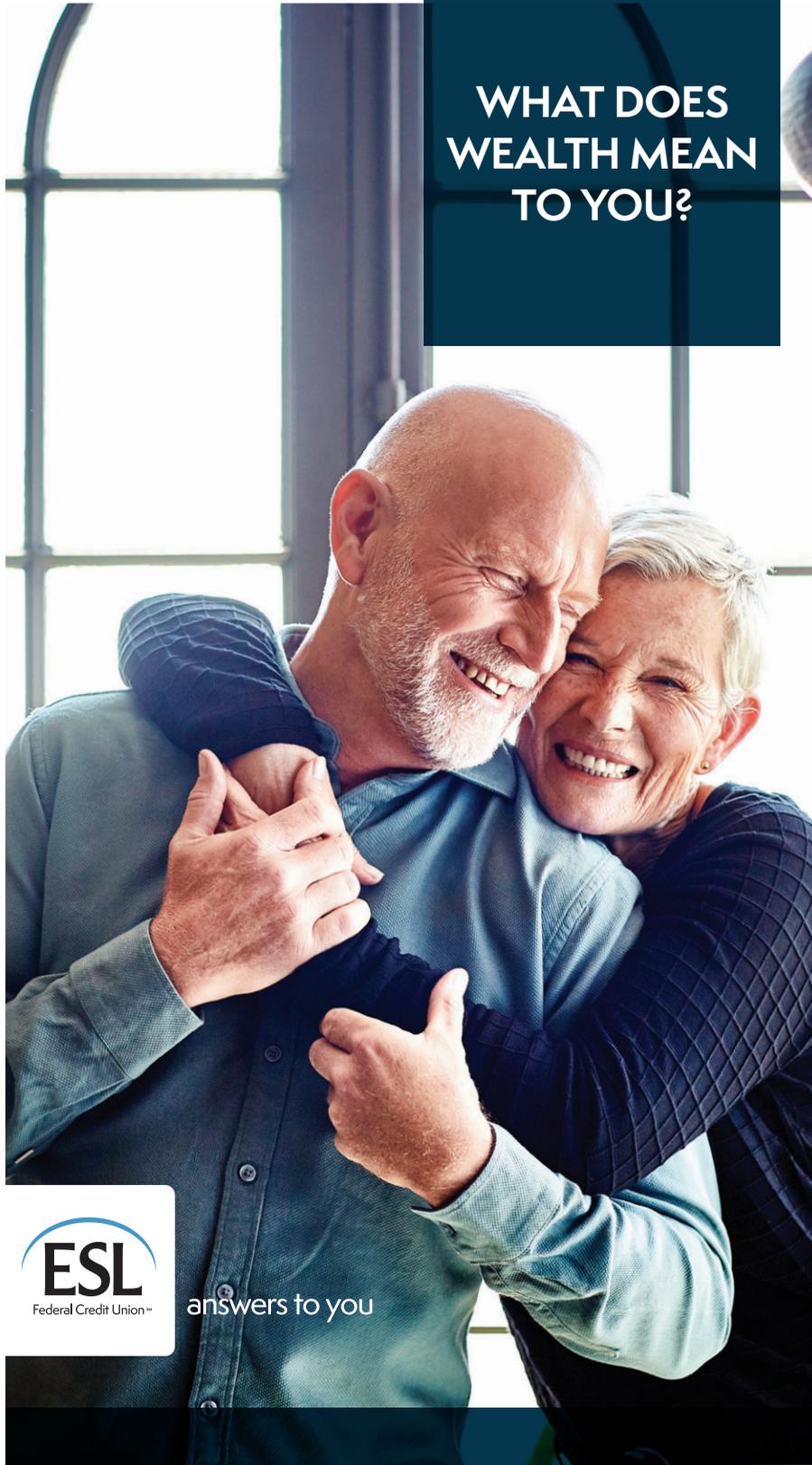
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**WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

Continued from page 1  
 leaders who are at the top of their careers and who achieve excellence professionally, in the community and through mentoring. Award winners will be announced in March 2018 and recognized at an awards celebration in April 2018. “The Rochester Business Journal is

**COFFEE**

Continued from page 2  
 “I absolutely love roasting coffee,” she says. “It is scientific to a point and creative to a point. It’s like legitimate therapy for me. I love getting the feedback and tweaking different things about my roast process to highlight different parts of the coffee.”

Growing up, Colon had many ideas for her career. She is a native of northern New York.

“As a teenager I wanted to be a race-car driver, I wanted to be a tattoo artist, I wanted to be a rock star,” she says.

Colon went to Roberts Wesleyan College and graduated with a degree in business administration in 2007. She had been homeschooled, so the college environment was a break from the norm.

“I was terrified to go to college because I wasn’t used to learning in a classroom setting,” Colon says. “I loved the area, I loved how close I was to the city, (and) I loved that it was small.”

She started college thinking she would become a teacher, but her focus shifted to business.

“When I did my observation in the classroom I absolutely loved being with the kids, I loved playing with the kids. I was helping the kids, but I realized teachers don’t get to play all day, and they have to boss kids around and that’s not what I wanted to do,” Colon says.

After school, she and her husband worked at Java’s—she at the Rochester Institute of Technology location and he as general manager of all Java’s locations.

The experience opened Colon’s eyes to good coffee and good business practices.

“I absolutely just fell in love with coffee—we both did,” she says. While in high school, Colon lived with her sister in Rochester one summer. “She and I drank frozen cappuccinos from the gas station like there was no tomorrow, which is hilarious to me now. And then in college I was drinking a pot of coffee a day, but I was using french vanilla-flavored creamer.

“Once I started working in coffee and learning how good coffee could be, I stopped putting sugar in my coffee, then I stopped putting milk in. I never knew what I was missing,” she adds.

Almost immediately after starting at Java’s she knew what she wanted to do: open her own shop.

The experience at Java’s helped the pair understand where they wanted to go and how they wanted their own business to be one day. They also admired the depth of coffee roasting that was

committed to recognizing professional excellence and celebrating success,” Fischer-Huettner said. “We are looking for women who truly inspire others around them—through their actions, their words and their deeds—to be the best!”

Nominations are now open. Go to [rbj.net/events/women-of-excellence/](http://rbj.net/events/women-of-excellence/) to nominate female business leaders for the Women of Excellence awards.

already happening in Monroe County.

“It was kind of like a springboard; I instantly fell in love with coffee and I wanted to learn more and more. We would visit other coffee shops and compare what they did to how we did it,” Colon says.

After a few years at Java’s, the couple, now married, decided to start their own roastery with plans to open a cafe one day. But when they attended a coffee conference in Boston they serendipitously were able to get the equipment they needed for a retail shop, Colon says.

“Things just kept falling into place, and all of a sudden we were opening a café.”

The Colons opened Fuego Coffee Roasters on Aug. 2, 2013, at 45 Euclid St. downtown. They now have an outlet at the Rochester Public Market as well, and the company also supports a variety of events from weddings to festivals.

The focus has been on flavor. There is no syrup bar or whipped cream at Fuego Coffee.

“We wanted to highlight the coffee for the coffee itself from the beginning,” Colon says. “We didn’t want flavor shots, we didn’t want whipped cream. We wanted people to taste the coffee, and we were only doing hand pours in the beginning.

“People would come in and be like, ‘why does it take five minutes to get my coffee?’ And then they would have their first sip and their eyes would open,” she says.

Since then, the Colons have added homemade vanilla syrup and chocolate from Hedonist Artisan Chocolates.

The twists and turns of business force owners to forge their own paths forward, Colon says.

“What I’ve definitely learned is Murphy’s Law: anything that can go wrong, will,” she says. “You can’t expect things to happen for you. It’s not easy, and it’s going to take all your energy and all your time, but it’s totally worth it.”

“This city is full of good coffee,” she says. “We do what we do, and we do it well. We do try to visit and support other local coffee shops, (but) we never try to mimic them. We all can do what we do well.”

#Team PXY with Carter and Corey on 98PXY is a partner with Fast Start.

Listen on Monday from 6 to 10 a.m. for their interview with Renee Colon.



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