

Nikki Aitchison The Illawarra Hotel

2024 IWIB Best Business

Nikki is publican of the Illawarra Hotel – a family run hotel operated by Nikki, her husband and family.

Nikki has always had a career in hospitality, starting off at 15 years old as a trainee Chef. At the age of 20, Nikki was the manager of a 2,200 capacity hotel, where she learnt very quickly that resilience was her best friend and it was at this point she really embraced who she was as a manager.



At the age of 24 Nikki took on her first Licensee role of the beautiful heritage hotel previously owned by Dawn Fraser, the Riverview Hotel in Balmain. With a public bar downstairs and fine dining upstairs, Nikki built her dream team and went on to win 3 coveted awards with the Australian Hotels Association – being Best Casual Dining (twice) and Chef of the Year.

At age 27, the operators of the Riverview Hotel expanded their pub holdings in the Balmain area and Nikki was now managing 3 hotels! Nikki saw this as a valuable experience in approaching hotels from a business-centric perspective.

Nikki is now the proud publican of the Illawarra Hotel, looking after all aspects of the hotel, its visions and its workers.

In 3 short years Nikki has implemented a business model that is a great benefit to the region. From giving back to the community – the Barstool Brothers, continual involvement with Kidswish, silent discos, Escabags, heavily supporting the Illawarra Convoy and their work with the young Indigenous community members in conjunction with Woolyungah Indigenous Centre....and more! It is important to Nikki that she and the business be active members of the community.

Nikki has taken the Illawarra Hotel to the level to win many Awards – the 2021 IWIB Best Business, 2023 Business Illawarra Awards winning Excellence in Sustainability. In 2023 they also won the Best Regional Local in the AHA Awards for Excellence and the 2024 IWIB Best Business.

Nikki is the mother of 2 happy little girls – and is proudly shaping them into the next generation of hardworking, motivated women by leading by example - as an outstanding role model to her children.