

Virginia's Premiere Indoor Axe Throwing Lounge: Nikki Montero & Axe Republic

In a lot of ways, axe throwing is like bowling. Your group has its own lane, with an attendant to get you started; all the equipment is kept at the venue, so you only need arrive in the correct attire; league nights are on Wednesdays; and your time there is as much about food, drink, and company as it is about competitiveness. At least, that's the case at Axe Republic, on the corner across from Buffalo Wild Wings. "A lot of the places that I researched, they were more bare bones axe throwing, so a very industrial feel," says owner Nikki Montero. Many axe throwing venues can't compare to Axe Republic's menu of build-your-own hot dogs, loaded tater tots, pulled pork barbecue sliders, onion rings, french fries, and more. A partnership with Virginia Beer Company and a Richmond cidery doesn't hurt, either.

But don't be fooled—Nikki, a registered nurse and former military wife, has her priorities straight. "I made sure that safety is the number one priority in Axe Republic, and then fun," she says, "and the way that I did that is I expanded my time from [the standard] hour to 75 minutes...and each lane has an axepert." For the first 10-15 minutes, the axepert can train customers on the safety guidelines, and let them get comfortable throwing the axe while the axepert gives pointers on how to throw it correctly. "They're always there, with you, to help you, and help you to get better," says Nikki. Often, even if they've never thrown an axe before in their lives, customers will want to stay after the 75 minutes—and if Nikki has the time and space to accommodate them, she will.

Though Axe Republic only opened six months ago (October 25), Nikki already has stories. Last winter, a snowstorm came through and shut everything down. "Everybody was closing, and this one couple, this young couple," says Nikki, "I think it was their seventh wedding anniversary...and they had some young children, and their parents were taking care of their kids for the first time, so it was this huge deal to be able to finally get out and celebrate." But everywhere was closed, and Axe Republic was closing early as a precaution. "I said, 'Oh I'm sorry, we're getting ready to close,' and you could just see the look on their face of disappointment." Nikki and her staff ended up letting them in—they found out what the couple's wedding song was, played it for them, dimmed the lights, and reportedly had a great time.

Nikki's passion for being with people—and encouraging them to be with each other—has already had a positive impact in the months since Axe Republic opened. One way to support Axe Republic is through Parkway Printshop's Here for Good campaign (parkwayprintshop.com/here-for-good), in which other New Town businesses are also participating. The best way, however, is to go throw an axe when it's safe to do so. As Nikki says, "I know that the community's...gonna be ready for something to release all this pent-up frustration that they have and get back to that place of laughing, and being with other people."

Brought to you by New Town Williamsburg—stay home, stay safe, support local business. Kit Arbuckle reporting for the New Town Commercial Association (edition 20.7)