

Lawsuit Charges Celebrity Chef Michael Chiarello with Sexual Harassment & Labor Law Violations

Former employees of San Francisco-based restaurant Coqueta claim Chiarello created an environment that led to a disregard of laws & ongoing sexual harassment.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, USA, March 15, 2016 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The Armstrong Law Firm](#) has filed a [sexual harassment](#) lawsuit (San Francisco County Superior Court, CGC 16-550962) along with a wage and hour class action (San Francisco County Superior Court, CGC 16-550963) against celebrity chef Michael Chiarello and his associated restaurants and companies. The two lawsuits allege that Chiarello fostered a culture of workplace sexual harassment and also committed numerous wage and labor law violations.

The two lawsuits are filed on behalf Katherine Page and Asja Sever, formerly servers at Coqueta, a San Francisco restaurant located on Pier 5. It was founded by Chiarello and is owned by several of his limited liability companies. Page and Sever were highly regarded servers and regularly assigned to wait on VIP guests such as Carlos Santana and Russell Crowe. Page had been employed for nearly three years and Sever was employed for nearly two years.

Both Page and Sever claim that the restaurant workplace was sexually charged, hostile, and abusive when they began working, and that this atmosphere continued throughout their employment. The women allege that inappropriate sexual comments, touching, and other sex-related abuse by coworkers and supervisors, including Chiarello and his staff, including Coqueta's executive chef Dominick Maietta, general manager Mirko Galliani, and assistant general manager Marc Peyer, were common. Despite numerous complaints by Page and Sever, the abuse and harassment was ongoing and did not stop.

The complaint alleges that Chiarello directed his hiring managers to not hire women unless they wanted to have sex with them. The lawsuit claims that the sexual harassment and abuse of employees is endemic and that at least one female manager quit over Coqueta's culture of disrespect for women.

Both Page and Sever have witnessed Chiarello inappropriately touch, caress and stare at women in a sexual manner in the twelve months preceding the filing of this Complaint. The two, according to the complaint, also heard Maietta use homophobic slurs to describe Gays and derogatory terms to describe Mexicans and women. Page and Sever seek punitive damages

against Chiarello and his associated companies.

In a recent survey, the advocacy groups Forward Together and the Restaurant Opportunities Center questioned almost seven hundred former and current restaurant employees across 39 American states. The survey found that 90% of women in the restaurant industry have reported some type of unwanted sexual behavior or harassment from their coworkers.

Chiarello and his limited liability companies also face a class-action wage and labor law complaint. The lawsuit alleges that the restaurant failed to pay wages for all hours worked by employees; failed to pay overtime to qualified employees; manipulated time clocks and time sheets; and unlawfully required employees to pool their tips with kitchen staff. The complaint also alleges that this conduct was company policy.

In 2013, New York City Chef Mario Batali, a friend of Michael Chiarello, settled a labor law violation lawsuit for \$5.25 million.

Chiarello is a celebrity chef and author. He has hosted his own cooking shows for over a decade on PBS, Food Network, and Cooking Channel. He has also appeared on top rated food competition shows such as Top Chef and Top Chef Masters. Chiarello also owns Bottega Ristorante in Yountville and the Chiarello Family Vineyards.

Please contact Kelly Armstrong or Matt Vandall at The Armstrong Law Firm in San Francisco at (415) 331-4400 with additional queries.

[About The Armstrong Law Firm \(www.thearmstronglawfirm.com\)](http://www.thearmstronglawfirm.com)

The Armstrong Law Firm uses the law to obtain justice and compensation for people who have been subjected to discrimination, harassment, intimidation or unfair employment practices in the workplace. Kelly Armstrong has represented clients in employment cases against the nation's largest companies for the past decade and her cases have been featured in the national and international media. Matt Vandall has litigated employment cases for the past decade on behalf of both employees and employers and is now focused exclusively on representing individuals in employment matters.

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