

## Koli Zeka Is a Lucky Guy

I'm sure Koli Zeka won't mind me giving away his secret formula for watching the 4th of July fireworks in DC: a blanket, a bottle of wine, and the Iwo Jima memorial in Arlington. That's where he first witnessed – nearly 20 years ago – the spectacular pyrotechnics display that marks our nation's birthday, and it has become an annual pilgrimage for him.



the government weapons stockpiles in Albania, inviting the population to help themselves.

A state of emergency is declared and a curfew is imposed; all citizens must be home between the hours of 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. The US Embassy

evacuates its personnel.

And just in the nick of time, Koli Zeka wins the US green card lottery.

He arrives in DC on May 17, 1997. Within 48 hours he has an apartment in Rosslyn and soon thereafter, despite his extremely limited English, a job. Within a few months, he gets his start in the US restaurant industry at Summers, a sports bar in Courthouse. He works there for more than two years, rising up through the ranks (and learning the menu via the Oxford English Dictionary he brought with him from Albania). After a brief hiatus from the restaurant world, he runs into a friend who worked for Clyde's and he suggested that Koli apply for a server's position. He spends three years at Old Ebbitt as a server, trainer, and bartender. When Clyde's of Gallery Place opens in 2005, he moves there and is promoted into management.

In 2012, Koli departs Clyde's for Richard Sandoval's Zengo, which he manages for the next year, and then he completes a brief stint at the now-closed Eventide in Arlington.

He soon discovers that he misses the energy of downtown DC and - voila - DBGB is hiring!

There is one small snafu (which, in retrospect, Koli can laugh about). After an extensive interviewing process with top managers from corporate headquarters (including a screening with Daniel Boulud himself), Koli receives an invitation to travel to New York for a final interview. Almost immediately he receives another message, thanking

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him for his time and advising him the position has been filled. Koli phones the Human Resources Manager to find out what is going on; it turns out that an intern who was tasked with sending "ding" letters got a little

overzealous. The interview is still on, and Koli gets the job.

This story could have ended a thousand different ways. Luckily for the diners of DC, it ends with Koli's smiling face, greeting his guests at DBGB, which with his help is sure to become another iconic institution in the nation's capital.

**BECKI L. YOUNG**, co-founder of Hammond Young Immigration, is a business immigration attorney with 20 years of experience in the field. She has represented more than 100 of the world's most prominent hotels and restaurants, and facilitated the sponsorship of foreign professionals, trainees, interns and individuals of "extraordinary ability." Ms. Young is an active member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. She can be reached at 301-917-6900 or [byoung@hyimmigration.com](mailto:byoung@hyimmigration.com).

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