MENU

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(and why her dad loves his '50')

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Restaurants Canada
The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

It sometimes feels like the days go by faster each year, but we know that isn't true. What is true, however, is that change comes at us more quickly every day, sometimes so rapidly that it seems the only constant is change itself. Therein lies an opportunity.

If 2019 was a year of flux, 2020 promises more of the same. Political volatility is becoming more and more marked. Economic uncertainty hangs in the air. Food and labour costs are rising. These are definite challenges, and not to be taken lightly. But the basic aim of foodservice--the warm welcome, the friendly table, the delicious new experience--will always be in high demand.

The focus of this issue of MENU is less on food and drink than on other elements of foodservice vital to the industry today. Be inspired by visionary leaders, trailblazers and the range of possible partnerships. Now is the time for creative innovation. Today's unexpected connections can lead to tomorrow's well-loved choices.

Sometimes moving forward means taking a step back,

whether that means creating and strengthening relationships with your local providers or dedicating yourself to refining and perfecting techniques as showcased by the Ontario Independent Meat Processors. But change can be sweeping, too. Montreal's Tendresse made the radical decision to have a chef-free kitchen and has seen remarkable growth. Industry leader Paul Cesario shares insights gleaned from his more than 30 years in the business on the nature of how kitchens have changed, and how they might continue to do so.

Nor does change require you to discard everything that makes you unique. Becoming everyone's beloved favourite is a goal in and of itself. Mary Brown's Chicken & Taters, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this year with a huge party for staff and customers alike, proves that the commitment to good food can be rewarded. And don't forget Dairy Farmers' 2020 Milk Calendar. For 43 years the Milk Calendar has showcased the vibrant multiculturalism of our nation, honouring diverse traditions and trusted leadership in foodservice.

Change. Flexibility. Newness. Many of this issue's stories share a common thread: adaptability. And with good reason. As we leave this year, and indeed this decade, we know for certain that evolution is the only way forward. Which makes the theme of RC Show 2020: Diversify and Thrive, perfectly timed.

From March 1-3, 2020, at the Enercare Centre in Toronto, the RC Show 2020 will deliver programs, products, strategies, and expertise you need. The largest hospitality show in Canada will provide insights and experts for every aspect of your operation: the revenue streams and sustainability of your business, the scheduling and talent of your people and exciting new options for your menu.

As the year draws to an end, now is the opportunity to get out of your business to get you're your business. Reflect and learn about the year that was, and extend and grow your business for the future. Every day is a new day of opportunity to take your business, our industry forward. The New Year stands before us, waiting to be written. Allow the obstacles of your past to be the gateway of your future.







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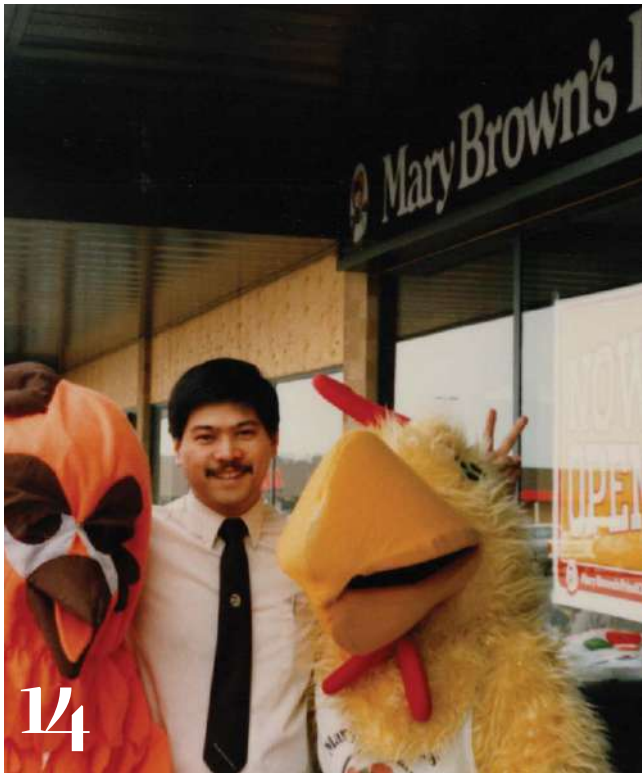
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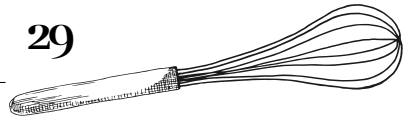
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GATHERINGS

At MENU magazine we get out and about to connect with you! If you have an event that you would like us to attend, please let us know at members@restaurantscanada.org.



Maple Leaf Foods Inc. is the first major food company in the world to be carbon neutral. The company's announcement acknowledges the impact of the global food system on the environment and the urgent need for transformative change to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to zero.

As a leading North American producer of meat and plant proteins, Maple Leaf's path to carbon neutrality is predicated on aggressively reducing emissions by meeting the gold standard of widely respected Science Based Targets, which align global greenhouse gas emission reductions with the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The Enlightened Feast took place October 18, 2019. Ivy Knight guest curated the unique culinary experience at the Gardiner Museum in Toronto, featuring a collective of feminist chefs brought together by C.L.A.M., the Confederacy of Love and Acceptance Among Mammals. Working with Executive Chef Bianca Azupardo of CLAY restaurant, Indigenous and settler chefs from across North America created a feast showcasing ingredients from an adventurous menu that stepped off the well-trodden path of Canadian cuisine.









EVENTS

DEC 3	Arrell Food Summit Toronto, ON
DEC 5-8	Savour the Sun Mountain Wine Festival Sun Peaks, BC
JAN 10-26	Niagara Icewine Festival Niagara Falls, ON
JAN 14-16	Salon de l'agriculture Saint-Hyacinthe, QC
JAN 15	Edmonton Whisky Festival Edmonton, AB
JAN 16-19	Victoria Whisky Festival Victoria, BC
JAN 18-19	Franchise Canada Show Calgary, AB
JAN 23-26	Guelph Organic Conference and Tradeshow Guelph, ON
JAN 25	Alberta Food and Beverage Expo Lethbridge, AB
JAN 31-FEB 2	Jasper Beer and Spirits Festival Jasper, AB
FEB 11	Canada's Agriculture Day Nationwide



MAR 1-3	RC Show Toronto, ON
MAR 2	RC Leadership Conference Toronto, ON
MAR 3	Breakfast With Champions Toronto, ON

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Paul Cesario built an equipment empire

HE'S NEWLY RETIRED BUT STILL HAS PLENTY OF OPINIONS ABOUT RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL RESTAURANT

BY ANDREA YU





After building up his food equipment operation, Trimen, for 32 years, servicing heavy hitters like Wendy's and Tim Hortons, Paul Cesario recently stepped down from the business. I sat down with Cesario to hear about his lessons learned from starting a business from scratch and future trends in foodservice.

Straight from the horse's mouth

ON THE TURNING POINT OF THE BUSINESS

I was working on the Wendy's account for a long time when we landed it. That was the turning point. It was like, 'Wow, we're supplying triple-A accounts.' We were no longer dealing with local businesses. It was national. I was focused on strictly chain accounts while my competitors weren't. After Wendy's, which I picked up in '93, I went after Pizza Hut, KFC and Taco Bell, which I picked up shortly thereafter.

ON KEEPING YOUR STAFF HAPPY

You always need to put yourself in their shoes. You need to give them security. We've always maintained our staff level even if we were slow. And we really listened to them and created an environment where they're comfortable to come to work. We talked openly with the staff. We didn't have too many rules or regulations. When we were expanding in 2000 and looking for a building, the staff said it's very important to get daylight inside the plant. So we looked for a plant that had windows to let the sunshine in. We kept the doors open during the day. The first three employees I ever had are still in the company. They've been with me from day one. There are 25-year veterans in the company. I've taken care of them, and they've taken care of me. It was a mutual relationship.



ON THE BIGGEST TRENDS IN KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

Ironically enough, the industry has gone back to its roots. So if you look at the very first kitchens, they cooked with wood and charcoal. And the biggest trend right now is cooking with wood and charcoal. At the same time, we have seen kitchens become more sophisticated. We see the introduction of combi ovens. These are ovens that cook with steam, convection and microwave heat. They cook a lot faster with a better quality of food.

↣ CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

ON EMBRACING OPEN KITCHENS

The open kitchen goes hand-in-hand with full transparency. The customer comes in and sees their food being cooked. I think it helps with food safety. It makes operators aware of how they're doing things because there are people looking in. The kitchen also becomes a stage. It's almost a performance. People love to sit close to the kitchens, and they love to see the action that's happening inside the kitchen. But it's very difficult to maintain because you have to be aware of everything. It is a harder kitchen to operate, an open kitchen. Still, I think the open kitchens are here to stay. They're good for the industry, good for foodservice and great for food safety.

ON THE EVER-SHRINKING KITCHEN

As real estate becomes more expensive, the days of the big, big kitchens are gone. And operators and chefs are becoming conscious of the fact that they have to watch their footprint and are shrinking the kitchen as much as possible. We are going to have to depend more and more on technology, for example, the combi oven, which combines three or four pieces of equipment. Chefs are becoming very versatile and very shrewd in terms of how they're building the kitchen.

ON MENTORSHIP

I've always had a soft spot for younger staff because someone believed in me when I was 20 years old, and I want to give that same opportunity back. So when somebody comes in that has the right attitude, and their heart's in the right place, we focus on teaching them. We need to support the younger staff, and we need to support people getting into the industry. We need to be sympathetic, and we need to teach them as opposed to just hiring experience.

ON THE RIGHT TIME TO STEP AWAY

It was a very tough decision. A long time ago, I decided that when you start a business, you either grow it, and you pass it on to your kids, or you grow it to sell it. For me, it was a no brainer to grow it and sell it. Gordon Food Service purchased a majority of shares in Trimen in 2014.

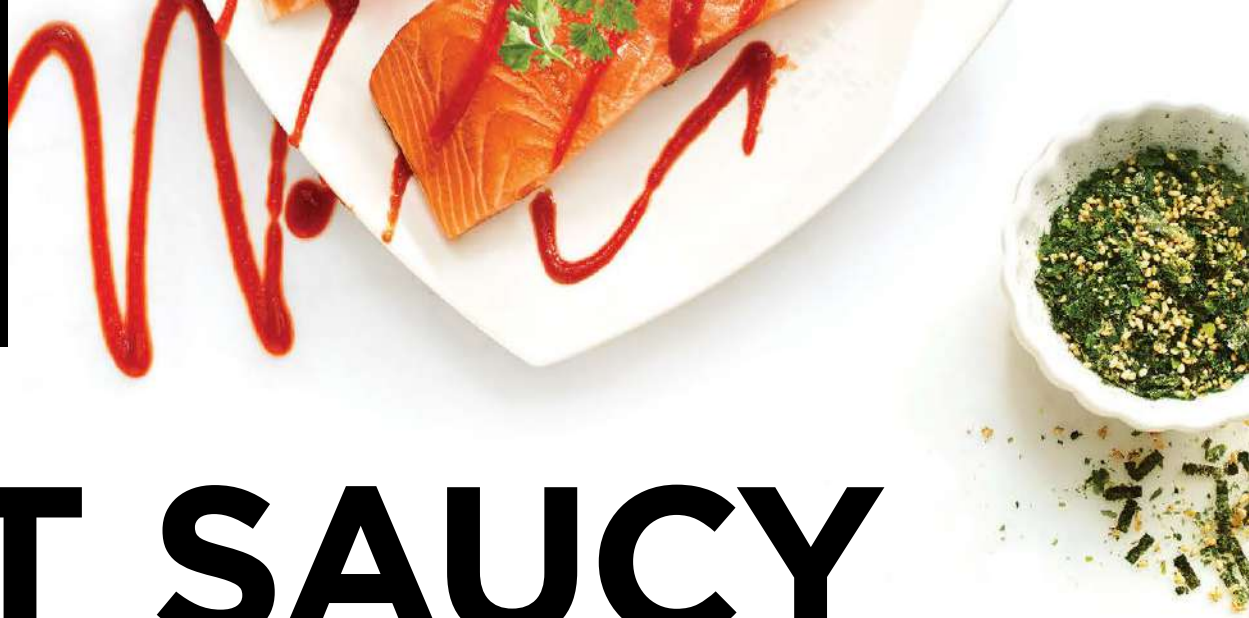
This whole journey was building the business. Taking it from 1,000 square feet to becoming the largest foodservice equipment supplier in Canada, from four to over a hundred staff, it was a lot of fun.

Happy retirement, Paul!

THERE ARE 25-YEAR VETERANS IN THE COMPANY. I'VE TAKEN CARE OF THEM, AND THEY'VE TAKEN CARE OF ME. IT WAS A MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP.



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then

Mary Brown's Chicken & Taters

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR RESTAURANT HAS STRETCHED ITS LEGS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

BY ARDEN JOBLING-HEY

In 1969, the Golden Skillet opened their doors in Newfoundland and Labrador. Three years later, after being rebranded Mary Brown's Fried Chicken, (and then again, later, to Mary Brown's Chicken & Taters), the restaurant opened its first franchise in Ontario—and they haven't stopped growing since.

Early this year, Mary Brown's celebrated 50 years in business by launching a new location on Water Street in downtown St. John's. The launch marks a lifetime of serving Canadians the best in quality fried chicken and fresh, Canadian potatoes.

100% CANADIAN OWNED AND OPERATED SINCE 1969

Mary Brown's Chicken & Taters is a Canadian success story. It has built a loyal following from scratch. Their bone-in chicken is cut in store, breaded, marinated and made to order every day. Mary's Signature Chicken and Taters are all 100 per cent Canadian. In addition to sourcing local ingredients, Mary Brown's has a history of being exclusively Canadian owned and operated. Today, CEO Greg Roberts still resides in Newfoundland, while COO and President Hadi Chahin works at the restaurant's headquarters in Markham, Ontario.







With franchises popping up across central and western Canada, Mary Brown's hopes to open more than 200 locations nation-wide by 2020, working their way out of the suburbs and into the urban centres.

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF FRIED CHICKEN & TATERS

While the brand has big plans to go global in the next few years, Mary Brown's maintains an intrinsic connection to their roots in Atlantic Canada.

In nearly every restaurant across Canada, you'll find a mural of Jellybean Row, colourful houses on a hilly terrain that represent a cultural and historical icon for the city of St. John's. Back on the island, many people you speak with have worked at Mary Brown's or know someone who has.

Earlier this year at its 50th anniversary celebration, Mary Brown's recognized employees who had been with the company for 25 years. Attendees included Ann Learning, a life-long fan of Mary Brown's and winner of an online contest that enabled her to join in the festivities. Ann, who stood in line at the original Golden Skillet in Newfound-

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today



land, attended the celebrations with her son, marking his first time back to the island in over 22 years. A Newfoundland native, Ann moved to Alberta over 20 years ago and was thrilled when a Mary Brown's opened just around the corner. Once it did, she made sure her sons both had jobs and fell head over heels with the Canadian franchise she knew and loved.

Recognized by Deloitte Canada as one of Canada's Best Managed Companies for 2019, Mary Brown's has always been renowned for taking incredible care of both their customers and employees.

The three-day celebration in St. John's included excursions like whale watching, an AGM for franchisees and a traditional kitchen party. To mark the occasion in its hometown, Mary Brown's also unveiled a fun mural paying tribute to the ocean culture of the city.

The wall was painted by local artists and has already started attracting newlyweds and tourists, eager for an insta-worthy backdrop. If you look closely, you'll also see a tribute to Mary Brown's hidden within the art. The scuba diving chicken really takes the cake.

DON'T MESS WITH BIG MARY®

While good food and exceptional service contribute greatly to the success of Mary Brown's recent growth, it is the loyalty of its customers that has allowed the Atlantic Canada-grown chicken joint to spread its wings, one customer at a time.

For those who know and love Mary Brown's, there's only one original chicken sandwich, and that's the Big Mary® with its signature one lone pickle on top. True to its roots, Mary Brown's continues to do things a little differently. Judging by the restaurant's recent success and rapid expansion across Canada and beyond, they won't be slowing down any time soon.



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THE SUM OF ALL PARTS

Lobster 'tales,' Michelin, mentors & digging in the dirt with chef Jason Parsons

BY STACEY NEWMAN

Sink or Swim

Jason Parsons is the executive chef for Peller Estates in Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario, but he's been in immersed in the land of food for close to 30 years. Parsons started out as a dishwasher in a local roadhouse near Cambridge, Ontario. He was just a teenager—so young that he'd fudged his employment application to get the job. His brother was the also the bartender, which helped. Parsons' first real job was washing glasses, but the roadhouse moved to disposable plastic. That's when they threw Parsons into the kitchen. Somehow, he was managing the whole kitchen within the year.

Parsons recalls the absurdity of his first days in a kitchen where he was microwaving lobster tails, slathering them in butter and dried herbs, and slinging baked potatoes by the trays. The whole place held "5,000 people. It was mad," he says. But his time in the roadhouse whet his palate and set him on the culinary road. The stars mostly aligned, and where they didn't, Parsons charted a path of his own. His uncle was the general manager at Chewton Glen in England—a Michelin-starred Relais & Châteaux (R&C) property, so Parsons hopped the pond and trained at Chewton. At the time, R&C was planning the opening of Langdon Hall in Cambridge, Ontario. Parsons jumped in headfirst at the ripe age of 16. It was at Langdon Hall where he met his mentor, chef Nigel Didcock. At first, Didcock tried to dissuade Parsons from becoming a chef. Instead, his advice incensed Parsons and made him ever more determined. Eventually, he was offered an apprenticeship and he simultaneously completed a three-year program at Humber College. Parsons "had the bug." He was a chef in his soul.



Parsons travelled. Then he'd return home to work for a bit. He went back to England and worked at another Michelin-starred property, Cliveden House, just outside of London (fans of the *Downton Abbey* film will recognize Cliveden's ballroom which is one of the settings in the film). Next up, he found himself in Bermuda where he says he finally and completely understood the allure of exceptional, local ingredients. He says he would "get calls from guys fishing tuna" and they'd offer "a 50 pound, a 70 pound, a 60 pound...They'd bring the boats to the back, you'd lift it out of the boat, cut it up and serve it that night." This was a far cry from his days of microwaving lobster tails.

Of his Michelin-starred training, Parson's took away the tenets of regimen and strictness. But of Bermuda, explains Parsons, when you start getting to a place where you're pulling fresh tuna put out of the water, "you start to fall in love with ingredients."

Parsons had found himself. He did stints as sous chef at Langdon Hall, at Hillebrand with Tony DeLuca; onto opening up Biff's Bistro by Oliver & Bonacini in Toronto with old friend Frank Dodd (with whom he'd worked at Cliveden); then he worked at the Millcroft under innkeeper Wolfgang Stichnothe, who Parsons refers to as amazing. Again, it was the blunt, unapologetic corrections of a true mentor that meant the most to Parsons. "What I loved about him was the fact that he's got that very direct German mentality. And as a young chef, that was the best thing you ever have," says Parsons of Stichnothe. "I would spend a week, I would create this dish, I'd finally do this, and put it all together...And I'd be just a little puppy bouncing off the wall. And he'd be like, 'I don't like it.'" Parsons credits Stichnothe's honesty with building his confidence—because when Stichnothe offered praise, it meant something. Parsons in turn built the Millcroft Inn from a buffet destination to offering tasting menus.

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Peller Estates & building his kitchen

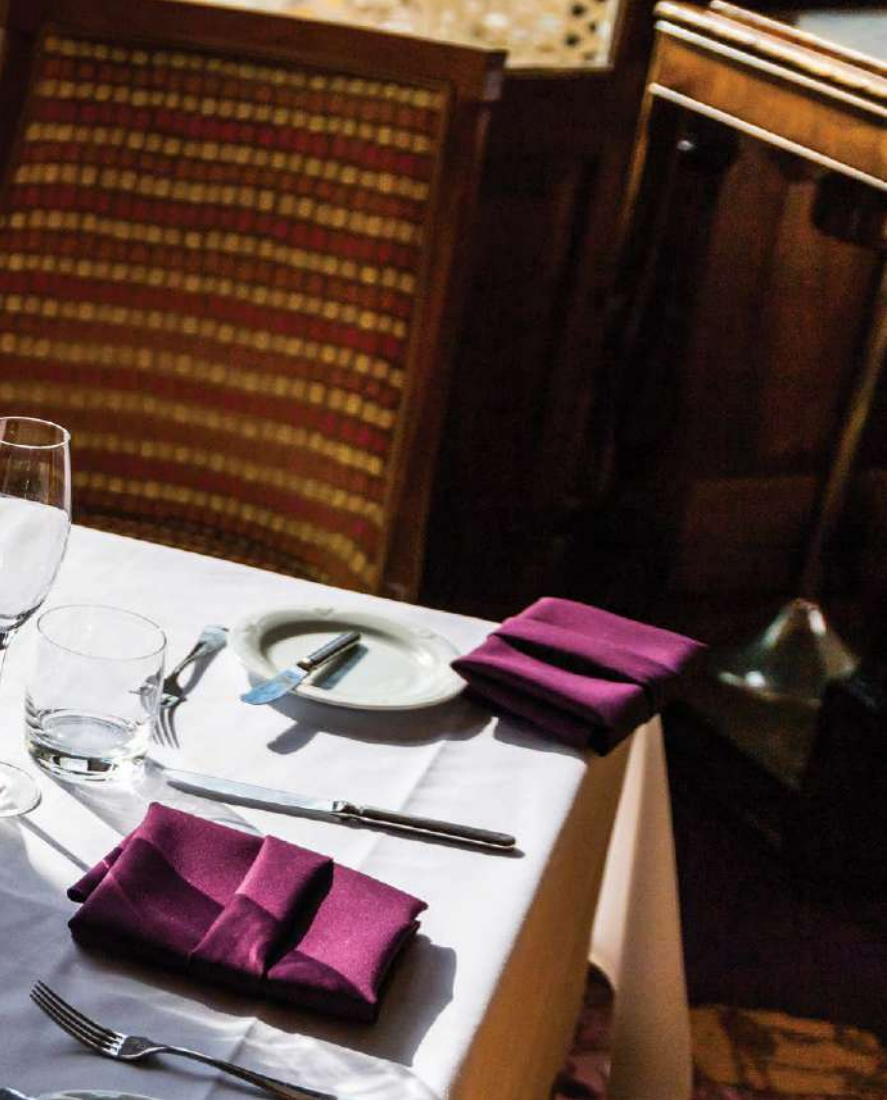
Today, for Parsons, the success of his kitchen hinges on ingredients and synergy within his team. Every stepping stone in his journey has culminated in a distinguished near-twenty-year career at Peller Estates where he continues to evolve. He remembers his first day walking into Peller. It wasn't "his kitchen." It needed a lot of work. But this also meant it was his to build into an ideal space that would serve all he had come to value as a fêted chef in his own right.

Parsons thinks back to guidance from his mentor, Nigel Didcock, who once said: "I can appreciate your food, but I don't understand your food." Parsons too often tried to "put all of his knowledge on one plate" instead of striving for simple goodness.

The now-established Parsons began to reinvent and to slow down. "I stopped buying cookbooks. Started standing in the garden, standing in the fridge," he says. This is an expectation Parsons actively passes on to the young chefs that assist in the kitchen every season at Peller.

The Peller Estates property has been open for nearly 20 years. In making it his own, Parsons began by changing the floor of the kitchen to tile, but upon doing this they had to move out the stoves that had exceeded their lifespans. He was faced with major challenges trying to design a space that would foster the environment integral to his methods. "I didn't really know where to go," he says. He reached out to the team at Garland Canada. This, says Parsons, made everything come together. They went to his location, listened to his concerns and expectations.

Most importantly, they watched him run his kitchen. "Some kitchens have fish with their own veg, meat with their own veg. I will never run a kitchen that way," says Parsons. He wants his kitchen to work socially, as a team; to operate with impeccable timing and open communications, not with members working independently. The folks at Garland understood this and designed a kitchen layout that met Parsons' criteria and philosophies. French Tops were a must—that was





an influential part of his coming up in the culinary world and, he says, "Whatever your first kitchen is, is the one that you're used to." He also wanted an open flame, then there are the convection ovens, and so on. But of the equipment, says Parsons, "stoves are the extension of a really good chef. Right? They're really good tools, but they're only as good as the people that are using it." In building his kitchen at Peller, Parsons' goal was ultimately to protect the integrity of what they do.

That is the Peller Estates philosophy too. "We want to make sure that people have the best experience... it's what is driving foodservice today is the experience of dining," Parsons finishes. He credits having a supplier like Garland with meeting every one of his requirements—and then some.

Parsons speaks affably and exudes confidence. I remark to him as we're wrapping up our interview that the many times I've spoken to him, he always comes across as "so chill." He claims he isn't always so. But throughout our interview, in his kitchen, during lunch prep, he has not once seemed harried. It's evident that he simply loves his work and his life. He recognizes the value of his education, that he has great people around him, and that he is able to laugh at himself and the mistakes and blunders of the past. He is generous with his time and his stories, fondly remembering the mentors and suppliers that have made him the chef he is today. ■

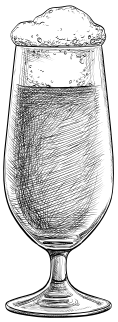
We want to make sure that people have the best experience... it's what is driving foodservice today is the experience of dining



MICHELLE THAM

In Pursuit Of Magic (And Why Her Dad Loves His '50')

Trailblazing Women of Canadian Foodservice



BY STACEY NEWMAN

My job is pretty awesome. As a woman, a writer, a managing editor and a photographer in Canada's foodservice scene, I get to meet, interview and learn from some of the strongest, most persistent and successful people in our industry.

Two years ago, I connected with Michelle Tham. It wasn't an extraordinary exchange; I was interested in receiving information from Labatt about their history and their brands. I was pointed in Tham's direction, and she has provided us with information about their brands, pairings, etc., throughout our issues ever since.

But it was a chance encounter at a barbecue this past summer with friends that found me chatting with a colleague of Tham's who told me that she often works with Labatt (her name is Caitlin O'Connor). I said that I know Michelle Tham at Labatt who sometimes contributes to our magazine. O'Connor became effervescent; she bubbled over telling me all about Tham's story and work in the food and beverage industry. O'Connor suggested that I had to speak to Tham... about Tham. So, I did.

BEGINNINGS

Michelle Tham's education was in Hospitality and Tourism Management. She graduated from Ryerson University with a Bachelor of Commerce, with the full intent of becoming a chef and one day owning a restaurant. She comes from a food-loving family. Her father's side is from Hong Kong, and her mother's side is from Calcutta, India. Her mother's family is large, and they hold gatherings where "the influence of the food is partially Chinese and Indian, and then of course what we have picked up being here," says Tham. Add to this: her mother is a sushi chef.

Despite her plans, Tham's life today isn't in the kitchen, nor is it in her own restaurant. Her obsession with flavour is her life's unifying theme. She got her foundational knowledge in school, worked in restaurants, travelled, learning the crafts of the kitchen. Then she was asked to open a restaurant. She jumped into the front of house to open a spot called Four, and she says, "I never went back into the kitchen."

Tham was drawn to the bar, the innovations constantly happening, the creativity, the flavours and processes, and exploring new ingredients. The bar became her new specialty, and she spent the next years opening some restaurants with established chefs in the beverage area. Tham homed in on where the trends were going in cocktails, spirits and beer, and wine at the time. She worked with Chef Claudio Aprile at Colborne Lane, with Chef Scott Conant at Scarpetta, and Chef David Chang in the opening team for Momofuku in Toronto and the beverage cocktail program there. "I believe that I brought a real culinary influence to what I was doing in beverage," says Tham.

She employed her skills—working with her hands, developing recipes, engineering the menu and assembling a beverage program—along with her experience running back of house, front of house and behind the bar.

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BEER

Beer resonated with Tham, partially because of how dynamic its growth was in the industry. It was the future she saw for herself. “I remember going into the Beerbistro…It really was one of the pioneers of bringing imported and craft beer into Toronto at a time where it was still very new,” she explains. Beerbistro stirred Tham’s ideas about beer and the flavour. “I had no idea that beer could taste this way. When I think back to it, it was a pale ale. It was not something crazy—bourbon barrel-aged or a funky farmhouse saison, or it wasn’t even a sour beer. It wasn’t anything nuts, but it was a pale ale.” She was overwhelmed by that one flavour experience.

Beer had captured her imagination because of the brewing process. There are over 100 different styles of beer, and “the process is still the same process.” She explains: “The principles of the brewing process don’t change. There are things we can do to manipulate it, there are different ingredients that we can integrate, but the brewing process is the brewing process. It’s the same brewing process around the world.”

And this is what fascinates her: brewers are constantly going to stretch the boundaries of what they can change or manipulate in the process to create something new. “You could spend years and years and years just studying hops,” says Tham. That complexity drives her.

Ten years ago was an especially exciting time to be involved in beer, and there weren’t a lot of women in that community. Tham doubled down and invested her career in beer by pursuing her Cicerone certification. At the time, there were few Cicerones and almost no women. Canada’s first was Mirella Amato, a person who Tham refers to as a friend and her mentor. “She really paved the way for women and Canadians in general to pursue that level of expertise in beer. There is nobody in the country that knows more about beer than Mirella and she has a supreme talent for not just gaining that expertise but sharing it. So, she is a real role model; I’d say anybody who considers themselves a beer educator would look up to her.” Tham continues to follow Amato’s example and passion.





“The principles of the brewing process don’t change. There are things we can do to manipulate it, there are different ingredients that we can integrate, but the brewing process is the brewing process. It’s the same brewing process around the world.”

Head of Education at Labatt

With her own achievements and education, business and hospitality experience and her professional accreditation as a Certified Cicerone, Tham created an opportunity for herself at a crucial point in the beer category growth, leaving behind restaurant roles with a real mission to help other Canadians experience what she had in beer. Tham became a Specialty Portfolio Manager at Labatt, and she achieved rapid success. It wasn't long before she built her role of head of education for Labatt, a role she has continued to grow for the last three-and-a-half years.

"Beer's an amazing place to be," she says. Her job takes her across the country and around the world to meet with brewmasters and crafters, shaping what she calls "works of art and science." The other part of her job takes her to establishments, on the ground: the people who sell and serve beer, servers, bartenders, retail store employees or the ones who bring beer to market. Finally she educates the everyday people who just love beer. "It is the best job to have in this country, where we are proudly a beer-drinking nation, and it's inherent in our pride as Canadians." Whether we're sitting on the dock at the cottage or enjoying a backyard barbecue, beer is so present in Canadian life. Canadians are really curious about beer. According to Tham, if you look at the Google Trends, Canadians search more about beer than any other country.

Tham created opportunities after achieving her Cicerone certification in a place where she could share her substantial knowledge. She wanted to align with the fast-growing beer category "and Labatt at that time, and continues to do so, is truly ahead of the curve when it comes to innovation with beer, while maintaining tradition and authenticity," Tham states proudly.

> "Somebody that I consider having such a great privilege to have known was the late Joel Manning, who was former brewmaster at Mill Street. It's really interesting, probably one of the most popular questions somebody like Joel got is 'What inspires you to create this beer or these beer styles?' And what I remember him saying often was 'I'm not inspired by necessarily other beers or other breweries; I'm inspired by other artists.'"
>
> Michelle Tham

TAKEAWAYS FOR ESTABLISHMENTS

Tham prioritizes the translation of the technical to something that makes sense, and that is meaningful to beer sellers and beer drinkers. Particularly the importance of training owners, operators and FOH staff on how food and beer go together. Tham regularly calls on her experience being in the kitchen, through creating cocktails to studying beer and brewing: "Today, what I do the most of is talking about how beer and food go together because it truly is the present and the future of where beer is going to go. Canadian consumer behaviour is leaning to trading up experiences, premiumizing their experiences. Beer will still be relevant, but the way that we enjoy it will become much more relevant to how we eat, how we integrate it into our lives as we become healthier as Canadians." Tham refers to flavours and beer styles as part of a healthy lifestyle. Beer has long been associated with nutrition across cultures, and today brewers continue to create beers that are lower in calories and lower in carbs. "Beer's a great moderation facilitator. We talk about health and wellness; health and wellness aren't just watching your calories. Health and wellness are our mental health and our social health, and beer is a beverage that brings people together." Tham believes beer will always be part of a happy and balanced lifestyle.

Restaurant, hotel and bar guests want chefs and FOH to be knowledgeable like never before. Back in the day, the options for pairings were wine. Now we see beverage professionals pairing food with all sorts of beverages, whether it is wine, spirits, cocktails, beer in its many forms, cider, tea and coffee. Consumers are not only driven by flavour preferences but values. This kind of disruption didn't exist several years ago. "It's been a whirlwind," says Tham. "The amount of change that we have seen, the number of innovations that have come through our breweries, and it's pretty amazing. We brought the number one non-alcoholic beer into the market with Budweiser Prohibition, and I can't imagine that was four years ago...Prior to that, there had never been a Canada 0.0 non-alcoholic beer, right? To see the rise of radlers and where that didn't exist before. It is just kind of crazy."

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Advice for Restaurateurs

Get educated on beer and the profitability of beer programs/menus. Then restaurants, in turn, can educate consumers. Talk about the way that beer and food go together. Talk about the way that the intensity of x beer style aligns with the intensity of x dish? Be able to explain what flavours exist in the food and what flavours exist in the beer that allow them to harmonize. Ask yourself, what are the contrasts of texture and taste that bring this food and beer together? "That's the work that I have to do in this role…so that as consumers and operators become more knowledgeable about that, it allows and empowers them to be more thoughtful in curating their beer list to suit the food." Tham can't stress the importance of education enough; that by not educating themselves and their staff, restaurateurs are leaving a lot of money on the table.

Tham considers herself, professionally and personally, in pursuit of that magic that is the exploration of flavour. It's why she continues to explore beer and different breweries and interact with chefs and restaurants.



BEING A WOMAN IN BEER

Tham says that the beer industry isn't perfect, but it has made incredible strides to be inclusive. "There is much work right now to close the gap in where women under-indexed as beer drinkers," she says. And she believes this goes back to the work she does, making beer relevant by becoming more knowledgeable. She looks to continued efforts engaging more female drinkers and growing female participation in beer. "I think we will continue to reinforce the visual and social cues of seeing women participate in beer as well. So, you'll see representation in advertising where you would see social occasions where it was just males drinking beer. I have a strong feeling you'll see much less of that," Tham explains. That's the thing: how we reinforce visual cues and how we build understanding around the opportunities for flavour and styles that we have in beer to resonate with more women.

On Immigration, Family & our Canadian Identity

It's a story Tham loves to tell. She has always seen Labatt—as the leading brewer in this country, leaders in social responsibility, and now being leaders in shaping the beer category—as a quintessentially Canadian company with a legacy in this country of representing and employing Canadians. "I've always equated Labatt with the Canadian experience for my family…My dad came here to the country in the late 60s and was drinking the number one beer in Canada at that time, which was Labatt 50." And though it's no longer the number one beer in Canada, Labatt 50 is still her dad's beer. Says Tham, "There's a bit of that symbolism of the Canadian experience for us."

Tham's family has been, perhaps, the greatest influence in her career. Their love of food and flavour: all that comes from her family, her heritage and the foods she's eaten and enjoyed growing up. Her family celebrations and their support through all the turns her career has taken, says Tham, "led me to where I am now. They're incredibly supportive, and I think what they are most supportive of is they can see that I'm very happy doing what I'm doing."



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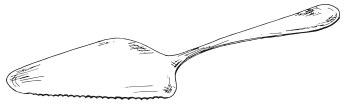
DAIRY FARMERS' MILK CALENDAR

A beloved & much-anticipated piece of Canadiana

BY STACEY NEWMAN

No matter which province or territory you grew up in over the last 43 years, chances are you will have come across an iconic bit of our country's culinary history. Every year the Milk Calendar makes its way into Canadian homes (in my home, last year's calendar is tacked to the wall next to our cookbook hutch). And though the recipes and photographs are new each year, the calendar has but one purpose—year after year: to celebrate Canadian food and people. The Milk Calendar has become somewhat of a collector's item. When looked at all together, the entire collection of annual milk calendars serves as a fascinating chronicle of our culinary history, for both home chefs and professional chefs alike. What does the upcoming 2020 Milk Calendar bring to Canadian kitchens? The ideas and creations of some of Canada's most revered culinary personalities—their recipes and dishes provide a lens through which we can understand their unique and fully immersive view of who Canadians are, what we want and how we eat. 2020 is the year of celebrating our identity as a people, the multiculturalism and diversity which defines us, the vastness of our geography and terroir and the leadership of people who have dedicated their lives to feeding Canadians.

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THE COLLABORATORS

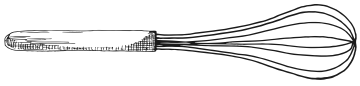
Vikram Vij and Afrim Pristine hosted the official Milk Calendar launch dinner in October at The Loft in Toronto, collaborating on dishes for a six-course tasting menu inspired by the Milk Calendar and drawn from their distinctive experiences spanning multiple countries and regional culinary styles, but resolutely grounded in Canada.

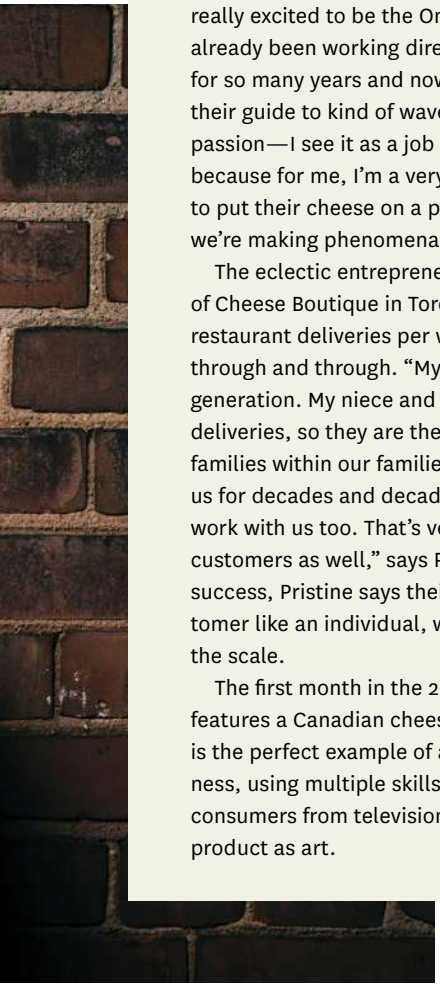
Vikram Vij is one of Canada's most celebrated chefs. Vij's culinary expressions are rooted in India, but his professional evolution comes out of cooking in Austria and then Western Canada, celebrating the land and constructing his highly creative and innovative processes. Collaborating with Meeru Dhalwala on a menu that would "change the landscape of Indian cuisine in Canada." Vikram opened Vij's in 1994. Now one of the best-known and most beloved Indian restaurants in North America, the menu uses traditional Indian methods, spices and culinary influences, and pairs them with sustainable, local produce from British Columbia. Vikram puts it plainly: "Why would I bring a beer from India when I have beautiful breweries here? Why would I buy milk from somewhere else when I have beautiful, sustainable farmers that are producing great milk right here? I didn't do things for marketing reasons. I did things because it logically made sense to me."

Over the years, they went on to open Rangoli, which offers a more casual dining experience, and then My Shanti, Vikram's first solo restaurant in South Surrey that pays homage to his travels around India. The serial restaurateur, author and the first Indo-Canadian "Drag-on" adorns the January 2020 pages of the calendar, featuring Vikram's Favourite Snack, which—as it encourages home cooks to experiment with the flavours of the leftovers found in anyone's fridge—is an exquisite lesson in sustainable gastronomy.



"THERE HAS BEEN A PALPABLE SHIFT IN THE INDUSTRY DRIVEN BY THE BOLD POSITIONING OF CULINARY BRANDS ROOTED IN VALUE-BASED EXPERIENCES FOR THE PASSIONATE AND EPICURIOUS."





Afrim Pristine is the world's youngest Maître Fromager, and Ontario Cheese Ambassador. "I'm really excited to be the Ontario Cheese Ambassador. I've already been working directly with all these producers for so many years and now to really be their guy and be their guide to kind of wave their flag and to showcase their passion—I see it as a job and almost as a duty, actually, because for me, I'm a very proud Canadian and for me just to put their cheese on a pedestal, it's easy, it's easy cause we're making phenomenal cheeses."

The eclectic entrepreneur is the third-generation owner of Cheese Boutique in Toronto. Now boasting 500 hotel/restaurant deliveries per week; it's still a family business through and through. "My brother and I are the third generation. My niece and nephew are on the floor and in deliveries, so they are the fourth generation. We also have families within our families, people who have worked with us for decades and decades and their family members work with us too. That's very special to us. I think to our customers as well," says Pristine. Of Cheese Boutique's success, Pristine says their strength is treating every customer like an individual, without exception and no matter the scale.

The first month in the 2020 calendar, December 2019, features a Canadian cheese board crafted by Pristine. He is the perfect example of a diversified approach to business, using multiple skills and platforms to connect with consumers from television to events, to presenting the product as art.

ON EDUCATION, NOT JUST MARKETING, FOR FOODSERVICE AND CONSUMER ALIKE

One of the modern challenges facing both the agriculture and foodservice industries is reaching the emergent consumer class. There has been a palpable shift in the industry driven by the bold positioning of culinary brands rooted in value-based experiences for the passionate and epicurious. To address this challenge and connect directly with Canadian consumers, Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO), who publish The Milk Calendar on behalf of dairy farmers across the country, has invested heavily in an upcoming culinary lifestyle brand—Savour Ontario.

DFO's new content brand is designed to bring in Canadian food culture luminaries for the purposes of educating and informing consumers and supporting local agri-businesses and foodservice operators. Savour Ontario is all about offering a dynamic, factual, informative and balanced knowledge base delivered through exquisite but simple local food recipes and signature regional culinary experiences that elevate local food, restaurants, chefs and experiences by:

- Working with like-minded partners (like Restaurants Canada, Taste Canada, culinary tourism groups, etc.) to surface, share and celebrate local food businesses and experiences.
- Working with a roster of culinary, institutional and restaurant contributors to collectively define a local food lifestyle focused on a balance of accessibility, food literacy and engagement with food experiences at the local community level.
- And defining and developing awareness around local cuisine as a 'moveable feast,' affording a polycultural and creative benefit to owners/operators/chefs and consumers.

THE INTEGRATION OF LOCAL RESTAURANTS

As part of the 2019 Milk Calendar community engagement and distribution program, DFO partnered with the Culinary Tourism Alliance to launch the first Milk & Honey Menus in 15 Feast On-certified restaurants across Ontario. Milk & Honey Menus are unique to each chef and restaurant and celebrate locally sourced and sustainable food, highlighting local dairy, cheeses and other foods crafted in each region. The program will expand in January 2020 and will offer community distribution of Milk Calendars at participating restaurants and venues.

The integration of restaurant experiences, local food, sustainable food shopping behaviours and efficiency around meal planning continues to inform the design of the 2020 Milk Calendar launch and promotional strategy, drawing in an eclectic group of chefs, professional home economists and restaurateurs.

The emotional response to The Milk Calendar continues to surprise and delight its creators. Last year alone, Dairy Farmers of Ontario received 20,000 unsolicited emails and calls about the milk calendar. It is a beloved Canadian tradition and a unique little corner of food centric Canadiana.

For more information or to receive your copy of the 2020 Milk Calendar, please visit calendar.milk.org



“

There's no hierarchy. That's the whole point. They work together as a team. When you have someone dictating, it's not the same energy. The energy here is to help each other

EGALITARIAN ÉLAN

A kitchen that doesn't have a chef and a vegan restaurant with just one salad on the menu. Welcome to the paradoxical—and successful—world of Montreal's Tendresse.

BY LAURA BICKLE

Despite Montreal's thriving restaurant scene, Catherine St-Cyr lamented the lack of sophisticated options for vegans like herself. "I wanted somewhere I could go with my vegan and non-vegan friends and have a boozy brunch with no one feeling like they are compromising." So St-Cyr decided to create it. She approached Marc-Antoine Coulombe and Isabelle Corriveau, the owners of Bar Renard on St. Catherine Street East in Montreal's Gay Village, where St-Cyr ran the bar. They were intrigued by her vision and passion—and as luck would have it, there was a space available across the street from Bar Renard.

Making that vision a reality was "seven long months of work," says St-Cyr, who developed the menu. Vegan restaurants are certainly not new, but the concept behind Tendresse is. "It had to feel grown-up, sophisticated and contemporary." The goal was to make diners forget Tendresse is a vegan restaurant. "People have to leave feeling full," she says. And if reviews and crowds since Tendresse opened last March are any indication, it's a strategy that's succeeding.

And part of that strategy lies in how the kitchen is run. There is no chef. Yup. No chef. "In the beginning, we were scared because who opens a restaurant without a chef, right? But it works. We all work together and welcome all ideas. It's a self-run kind of kitchen. The kitchen comes to me when they want to put something on the menu. But everyone is equal, and we really want to keep it that way."

And here's how it works: there's one person downstairs prepping, cutting, weighing and portioning ingredients and two people upstairs in the open kitchen heating and plating. Take, for example, Tendresse's hugely popular and vegan-stereotype-smashing Mushroom Waffle. The actual waffle and rich, flavourful sauce are made downstairs and brought upstairs along with the raw, sliced mushrooms. The upstairs staff fries the waffle, cooks the mushrooms and builds the dish.

"There's no hierarchy. That's the whole point. They work together as a team. When you have someone dictating, it's not the same energy. The energy here is to help each other," says St-Cyr, adding that tips are split among all the staff. In fact, she says, the system works so well that they were able to stop working with a food preparation service several months earlier than they had planned.

And the team concept extends to the ownership group. "We complement each other well," says St-Cyr, who runs the floor, develops the recipes and manages and hires staff.

Corriveau is responsible for the wine list and administration. "It's one thing to have food that's vegan, but drinks are not always vegan as well," says St-Cyr. "We wanted a 100 per cent vegan restaurant. Our idea was to have something gastronomic with a lot of good wines," says St-Cyr.

Coulombe, inspired by a trip to Cuba, developed the visual concept, which has a fresh tropical, retro vibe with a contemporary undercurrent—a reaction against the ubiquitous grey industrial feel of late. "We wanted something that's different but won't get old."

The Tendresse ethos also extends to its environmental policies: St-Cyr says they create very little waste. "We don't have a lot of garbage, and we pay to compost. The goal is to have a good restaurant where you can eat good food but at the same time be eco-friendly." One example of this philosophy in action: the pulp created by the signature Carrot Cocktail is used in the pancakes.

While St-Cyr says she is pleased that Tendresse has grown from her dream to a reality, she still sees lots of opportunities. "It was an amazing journey, but we're still changing things because a new restaurant always needs to improve." M

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alcohol reveals our true feelings

SAKE-WA-HON-SHIN-WO-ARA-WASU

IN CONVERSATION WITH SAKE SAMURAI MICHAEL TREMBLAY

BY AIDAN FISHER

Michael Tremblay was recently awarded the distinction of Sake Samurai. He is one of approximately 70 in the world. He claims it's not something he normally talks about, but now that he has the distinction, he doesn't have to go into as much detail about his past credentials!

Every year, the Sake Samurai association travels the world nominating sake experts doing great things.

"I went to Kyoto, where I had to dress in a formal kimono for the purification ceremony. This is something very few non-Japanese and Japanese people get to experience. It was very surreal," he says. He also visited a 1,500-year-old shrine as part of the ceremony. "I became the first Canadian (there was one other inducted from Vancouver) to be inducted into Sake Samurai." Michael is the ambassador for Ontario, and his job, according to him, is simply to promote and celebrate sake. "I'm starting to mention it more because it gets customers talking. It sounds really badass in a way," says Tremblay.



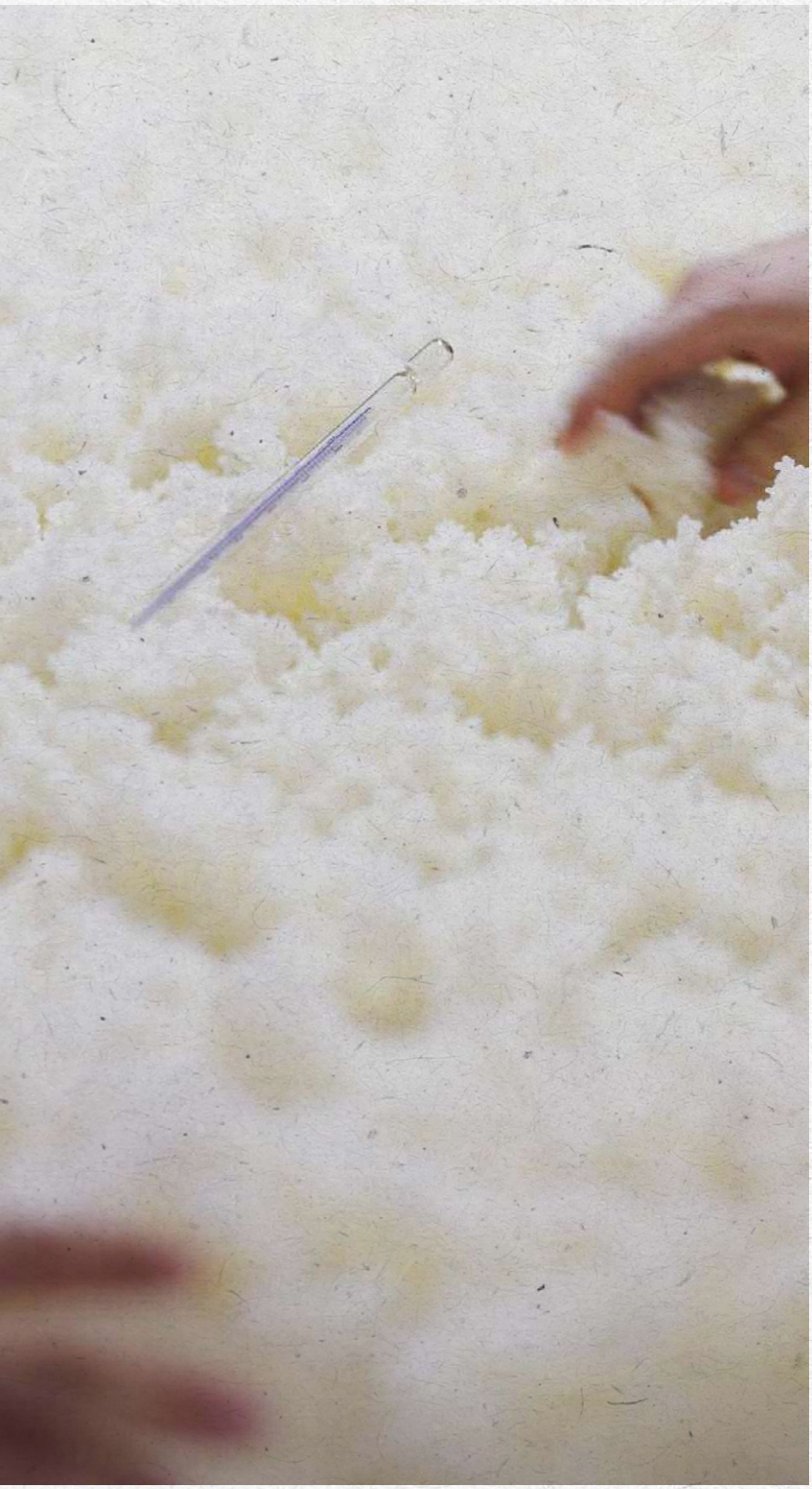
Most of the time, Tremblay can be found at Ki Modern Japanese + Bar in Toronto. “When we were planning on going from our list of 25 sakes to 70, my boss and I sat down and spoke about how we would get there. We are a 250-300 seat restaurant with 50 front of house staff.” Then, Tremblay had his staff completing a sake course. “The whole idea was that if I’m not present, there would always be an employee there who has a knowledge of sake. We now have about 12 certified staff,” Tremblay boasts. “We have a program where one or two seminars are taught a month, where you learn how to pair sakes and what compliments certain kinds of sake. My staff gets excited about it. I want my staff to keep learning. That is the benefit of working with a restaurant that supports education. It was important to create a culture where you’re not in sake school, but where you learn food ingredients, foods to pair with sake, etc.”

At the restaurant, Tremblay describes a plethora of Japanese beers and whiskey, which are “great to have.” But, he says, that a complex list of offerings can leave your guests lost. With Japanese cuisines and beverages, Tremblay reminds us that not everyone has been to Japan. Which makes it beneficial to teach staff as much about these products, where they come from, why they were developed as they were developed, and not just memorizing definitions.

“Anytime someone orders sake, I always ask them if they have had it before. I try to relax them so that they are not afraid to ask questions...I had two guests come in, and I started presenting cards about sake.” Tremblay and his staff then turn to the backs of these cards where he includes a map of Japan and where the various sakes are from. Of the two guests that came in, he continues, “A while after coming back to the restaurant, I spoke with them again, and they told me they kept the cards about sake and began being turned on by sake after reading and finding out more information.”

↣ CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

Anytime someone orders sake, I always ask them if they have had it before. I try to relax them so that they are not afraid to ask questions



Sake: the art of enjoyment through understanding

ACCORDING TO MICHAEL TREMBLAY

The reason so many people know so little about Sake is that there have always been limited amounts of sake available in liquor stores. It is mostly found in specialty shops. But things are starting to change. Tremblay says he could easily have 200 sakes on his list from the amount importers are bringing in.

The shelf life of sake is a year, at most a year and a half, which means that managing the inventory is very important. If creating an aged sake, the creators are the ones aging it. Some are designed to be more rich and earthy. Tremblay says that he personally owns a 24-year-old sake.

Are people afraid to try sake? “I think people are scared of it because, for a long time, the sake you could find was low-grade table sake, only served warm. They would use table rice and add more distilled alcohol. When you warm that up, the alcohol vapours are the only thing noses can pick up. When you consume warm alcohol, you metabolize it faster,” explains Tremblay. Most sakes have about 15 to 17 per cent alcohol, which is more than some wine.

Sake is usually sold by the bottle.

How is sake best served? It depends. Consumers typically drink sake at the temperature they like. The premium sake realm is divided into six grades, and most are best served chilled.

If served warm, flavours can develop on the cereal side such as banana bread and pear. When served gently warmed, if guests are eating steak or a rich fish, warming the sake will bring out that fullness.

The higher grades remove a lot of rice. By removing the fat and protein that surrounds the starch, brewers sometimes can develop flavours such as pineapple, bubble gum and apple. Higher grades tend to be very aromatic because they are created with lower tem-

perature fermentation. In Japan, they have created their own yeast rice strains, which creates even better sake.

The idea is to remind people that sake can be really fun to play around with. The "rules" are less rigid than the structure around conventional red or white wines.

Vessels used for sake: small ceramic cups, wine glasses, crystal glasses, etc. Sake is not fussy.

Did you say "sparkling sake?" Yup. Sparkling sake has only been around for 20 to 30 years in Japan, with creators only recently perfecting sparkling. Some are made with Prosecco, and some are simply carbonated. You can also make high-grade sakes taste delicious in the bottle with secondary fermentation. During the process, when pasteurizing, you kill off yeast and other microorganisms by heating it quickly. This stabilizes the sake so it can be left out at room temperature. When pasteurizing, the CO_2 that is created by the heating process is reabsorbed, so some CO_2 can escape. This lends the sake a Vino Verde profile with bubbles, and it is lighter and fresher.

What is the overarching flavour of sake? In terms of flavour, one of Tremblay's best friends describes sake on the palate as being like "very good coconut water." It has all kinds of floral and fruity flavours, especially in higher grades. As you develop your sake palate, you'll begin to sniff and taste out flavours such as melon, apple, green banana, tropical fruit and nuanced rice flavours. The savoury sakes bring out all kinds of cereal and malt flavours, and even fresh herbs.

Sakes that are aged for several years have the profiles of dried fruit like figs. A lot of people think sake is like vodka. It's nothing of the sort! Vodka and sake are not similar.

Tremblay finds that the majority of Canadians probably prefer lower grade warm sake. A lot of guests at Ki love it, and he loves low grades sometimes also. The warmth brings out a soothing depth of flavour. M

MICHAEL TREMBLAY'S SAKE FAVOURITES

In the market:

Okunomatsu "Sakura" Daiginjo

Dassai "45" Junmai Daiginjo

Tedorigawa Yamahai Junmai

Dewazakura "Oka" Ginjo

Nanbu Bijin "Southern Beauty" Tokubetsu Junmai

Kiyasho "Jikon" Omachi Junmai Ginjo

Domaine Taka Yamada Nishiki

Masumi "Nanago" Yamahai Junmai Daiginjo

To look for when in Japan:

Juyondai

Hachinohe Shurui "Mutsu Hassen" Black Label

Heiwa Shuzo "KID"

Yucho Shuzo "ALPHA"

Senkin Shuzo "Nature"

JAPANESE SAKE MAKERS EYE VANCOUVER EXPORT LAUNCH PAD

BY CHUCK CHIANG, BUSINESS VANCOUVER, BIV



The idea was to expand the Canadian market's view of sake as a traditional Japanese drink

Faced with a declining domestic market due to a rapidly aging population, Japan's sake industry is refocusing its export efforts in North America, including Canadian cities like Vancouver.

In October, ten craft brewers from the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association visited Vancouver as part of its three-city North American mission to boost exports. What's unique about the visit, organizers say, is that while it has previously focused on American cities, this year featured only one U.S. stop—Dallas—and two Canadian stops—Vancouver and Montreal.

The idea, said the executive director of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) in Canada, was to expand the Canadian market's view of sake as a traditional Japanese drink, with emphasis placed on cosmopolitan Canadian locales to showcase pairings with European and western cuisine.

"Japanese restaurants in Canada have been serving sake to people for many years, but the sake is usually served warm," said Jetro Toronto's Takuji Sakai. "That's only one way to have sake, but many Canadians, because they are used to having warm sake, thought it could only be drunk warm. So we are trying to educate and promote, introducing cold sake into this market."

That's why, Sakai said, the delegation to Vancouver featured a trip to western culinary establishments to showcase the varieties of sake and the ways it can be consumed. That includes cold and room-temperature sake paired with dishes from French cuisine, as well as Pacific Northwest dishes.

"Sake's mellow flavours are ideal to complement natural flavours," said Takashi Hatori, consul general of Japan in Vancouver, noting the West's shift towards healthier cuisine and lighter tastes goes well with sake's profile. "Vancouver, gifted with a multicultural population and a demand for fine cuisine and new things, is an ideal market for Japanese-made sake."

Sakai also mentioned sake is still most heavily consumed by Canadians of Asian origin—specifically Chinese Canadians—so cities like Vancouver and Toronto will continue to have strong markets for the rice wine. But he added that the current effort is a clear attempt to broaden sake's appeal beyond consumers who are familiar with Asian culture and cuisine.

Tokyo's play for more sake exports in Canada has push and pull factors. On the pull front, the aforementioned market conditions in Canadian cities coincide with Japan and Canada both being in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) as a reason to look for more free-trade opportunities. While Sakai said Japan sees the CPTPP as a bridge for other agricultural products, most other processed foods the country wants to export require extensive food safety documentation in either English and French under Canadian laws.

The Japanese agricultural sector's small and medium-sized producers often lack the resources to handle English/French documentation. That creates a barrier for other products to expand market share in Canada quickly. Sake, however, has no such requirement.

"Sake is an exception, so we are especially promoting it now," Sakai said, adding that Japan's sake exports to Canada have increased 12 per cent to 13 per cent every year on average since 2010.

Producers also face domestic issues because Japanese consumers are drinking less sake. Due to the drink's strength (15 per cent alcohol by volume versus 9 per cent to 16 per cent for wine and 3 per cent to 9 per cent for beer), sake is usually drunk by middle-aged consumers, and that demographic is shrinking rapidly as Japan's population ages. There were about 921,000 births in Japan in 2018. That's down approximately 25,000 from 2017 and marks the third straight year of births falling below one million. That number contributed to a net population decline of 448,000 in 2018, according to a *Japan Times* report—the 12th straight year of population decline in the country.

A United Nations forecast estimates Japan's rural population will shrink by 17 per cent between now and 2030 and fall an additional 2 per cent every year afterwards. Younger Japanese, meanwhile, have shifted their preference to western drinks like beer, wine and mixed cocktails.

That's why the export growth of sake is so important for Japan, Sakai said. Sales in markets like North America have doubled in the last decade.

Sakai added that he would like to see other Japanese agricultural exports also make the jump.

"It's a very important time not only for sake, but for all of our agricultural exports," he said. "In Japan, we are facing an aging population where the number of consumers are decreasing with the population. So the Japanese market is declining; if we are to keep our production, we should export more." M

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- Support for the program from stakeholders, from gate to plate
- A transparent system to ensure the whole industry is informed and involved
- A commitment to continuous improvement and to evolve as we learn

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CFC can help you by providing materials and references to answer your consumers' concerns, from communications with farmers, to third party experts, to special content addressing specific issues and more.

Animal care, food safety and sustainability are just some of the assurances that also come with the *Raised by a Canadian Farmer* brand. The mark, being actively marketed and supported by many retail and foodservice companies, shows consumers that Canadian chicken is a delicious and nutritious choice, and that it's raised by farmers they can trust.

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Chicken Farmers of Canada
Les Producteurs de poulet du Canada

Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

#ImmigrationMatters

BY SOPHIE MENDES, FOUNDER OF THE NEW CANADIAN PROJECT

Chef La-toya Fagon was born in Canada but spent the first six years of her childhood living with her aunt in Jamaica. She says this was largely because her parents, who had immigrated to Canada as young adults, wanted to make sure she grew up understanding her roots and feeling connected to her culture.

While she says she appreciates the decision they made, returning to Canada at the age of six was challenging for her at the time. "My sibling and I had accents coming here," she recalls, laughing. From the moment she got off the plane, she says nothing felt familiar. She remembers feeling quite shocked the first time she accompanied her father to go grocery shopping—she says she had never been in a store so big in her life.

La-toya's passion for cooking began in her teenage years. Her mother moved to the United States for a new job, her father knew how to prepare fewer dishes, so La-toya decided to take matters into her own hands and figure out how to make dinner for herself. She signed up for a night class at George Brown College to aid her with this mission. Pretty soon, she fell in love with life in the kitchen and enrolled in a full-time culinary course.

"My parents were so disappointed," she laughs. "I mean, I have two siblings who are engineers and one who is an accountant—they were expecting another career for me." But she says she didn't let this deter her from pursuing her new dream to become a professional chef.

"I have been so blessed in my career," La-toya says, reflecting on her path to success. "One of my professors came to me one day and told me that Loblaws was looking for a chef to open an in-store school." She says she loved the idea and applied for the opportunity right away. She ended up opening 14 of those cooking schools across the Greater Toronto Area before deciding the time had come to open a business of her own.

La-toya first started operating her company Twist Catering out of her parents' kitchen. After 16 years of catering for private events—often for prestigious clients, including the Toronto International Film Festival and the Toronto Raptors—La-toya is now opening her first physical location in Markham, Ontario.

While she was trained in French and Italian cuisine, La-toya says most people just ask her to cook Jamaican food—which is why she decided to name her company Twist Catering. She says over the years, she has created a menu that represents Canada's diversity, mixing dishes from different cultures together. For example, she points to a chicken tikka masala thigh, cooked in a Jamaican drum, served with biryani rice. She says her favourite dish that reminds her of home is a goat curry that she chooses to serve with rice pilaf.

She says a critical way that she ensures her menu reflects Canada's multiculturalism is by having a team that reflects that diversity. Currently, she works with an Indian sous-chef, a Greek pastry chef and a baker from Trinidad and Tobago. "I thank my parents every day for choosing Canada," she says.

You can learn more about La-toya and why #ImmigrationMatters to Canada's foodservice and hospitality industry at MENUmag.ca.



Photo by @MurtazaDaub



LOOK WHO'S COMING FOR DINNER

7-Eleven's push for restaurant-quality delivered with 24/7 convenience.

BY TROY TAYLOR,
VP OF OPERATIONS FOR RESTAURANTS CANADA

I had the chance to spend some time with Chef Benny Cheng at the TuttoFood show in Milan. TuttoFood is a growing international food showcase hosted by Fiera Milano. We were invited as a Canadian delegation to experience Italian products, and all the show has to offer. Nothing too unusual about spending time with a chef at a food show except it was in Italy, and chef Cheng is the corporate chef for…wait for it…7-Eleven Canada. He was at the show looking for global food innovation ideas to help drive 7-Eleven Canada's business. Their foodservice business.

Now, as you contemplate that introduction, I will tell you that I have had three distinct responses from other foodservice professionals to this seemingly odd pairing. It prompted me to dig a little deeper.

The first reaction was a polite chuckle, which is understandable. A corporate chef at 7-Eleven Canada. Really?

The second was a bit more inquisitive. That tilt-of-the-head look of "WTH?" The kind of reaction that includes doing the math behind the mismatched association of a corporate chef position within 7-Eleven Canada.

The third response was an upright bolt, a look that says, "HOLY SH*T."

"WE ARE STRIVING FOR RESTAURANT QUALITY DELIVERED WITH 24/7 CONVENIENCE. WE SEE WHERE THE CONSUMER IS HEADING, AND WE SEE THAT ADDING A BETTER-FOR-YOU FOOD PROGRAM IS A SUSTAINABLE WAY TO GROW OUR BUSINESS. OUR TEST OF BEYOND MEAT PIZZA IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF DRIVING INNOVATION TO MEET THE CANADIAN CUSTOMER'S CHANGING NEEDS."

As it turns out, the last reaction is the correct response. And, as you ponder it, you may run through all three reactions to come to the same conclusion as I did.

As we all know, consumers are feeling pressed for time. They are looking for convenience, value, frictionless transactions while trying not to sacrifice the quality of food they eat. They simply want what they what, when they want it, with no issues. It is forcing the entire foodservice sector into scramble mode right now, and everyone is being pushed to try to meet these new demands.

But, if you think about it, 7-Eleven has been providing that "grab and go" service for years. In fact, in the 60s, they moved to their first 24-hour-service operation and introduced take out coffee, which is commonplace today. They just weren't focused on the "fresh" side of the business.

You can always count on 7-Eleven to be open for your convenience to pick up bread, milk, late-night munchies, or a fresh to go packaged sandwich when you are dashboard dining. And, let's not forget about a Slurpee. But you don't associate 7-Eleven Canada with a fresh hot food program, until now.

7-Eleven Canada has been quietly transforming their business by diversifying their food program with the key component of that strategy being the expansion of fresh cold and hot food products.

Just to put it into context, 7-Eleven is a leader in the convenience retailing industry. Based out of Irving, Texas, they operate franchises and licenses in more than 66,000 stores in seventeen countries, including 11,600 in North America and 636 locations in Canada. So, when they look to join in the foodservice sector, people are taking notice.

Chef Cheng explained what is driving 7-Eleven. "I came on board six years ago, and our goal was a lofty one: to make 7-Eleven Canada a food destination. We started with basic recipes, fresh sandwiches, subs, wraps. We have been selling Crispy Classic Chicken in a small number of stores for over 20 years. In 2015 we decided to expand it to over 200 stores. Crispy Classic Chicken is made fresh

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in stores throughout the day from fresh 100% Canadian chicken pieces, battered and breaded in built-in kitchens with multiple fryers."

Just over two years ago, 7-Eleven Canada introduced a fresh-baked program that included pastries, croissants and cookies. Chef Cheng indicated: "It has been a huge win for us, as we now have over 400 stores on the program."

7-Eleven has also outfitted over 500 stores with Turbo-Chef ovens to supply their customers with "hot from the oven in minutes" grab and go pizza, wings, chicken fingers, etc. They have even partnered with the Chicken Farmers of Canada to emphasize their locally sourced 100 per cent Canadian chicken.

Chef Cheng outlined the vision. "We are striving for restaurant quality delivered with 24/7 convenience. We see where the consumer is heading, and we see that adding a better-for-you food program is a sustainable way to grow our business. Our test of beyond meat pizza is another example of driving innovation to meet the Canadian customer's changing needs."

7-Eleven Canada has also been trying to incorporate the fresh offering the right way. They lead by voluntarily posting calorie labels nationwide on non-packaged foods and beverages. In 2015, 7-Eleven Canada announced its "Better Choices" program to provide customers with nutrient data for non-packaged foods and beverages.

Continuing the evolution to a foodservice-first retailer, "7-Eleven Canada is the first convenience store to gain membership with Restaurants Canada and subscribe to the informed dining program," said Mel Tiruneh, 7-Eleven's senior director of merchandising. "Canadians appreciate the choice we provide from craveable favourites to healthy snacks and meals on the go."

One of the challenges for 7-Eleven Canada, like all retailers in food, is service standards and training. They are a must for 7-Eleven. And, as chef Cheng said, "It is a bit harder for us verses other franchised foodservice operations. Our assortment and services are broader, and we never close." This creates the need for ongoing training and standards reinforcement of foodservice basics and processes across a large team. They have developed best practice guides to reinforce and maintain high foodservice handling standards.

So, why was Chef Cheng at a food show in Milan? "We are looking for products to help us continue to expand our food program. Global product innovation, ingredients and things like quick-serve pasta ideas and hopefully some outside-of-the-box solutions."

7-Eleven Canada has also hooked up with third-party delivery aggregators Foodora and Uber Eats, creating a whole new level of opportunity.

So, as I sat on the plane ride home and thought about the blurring lines between retail and foodservice, I pondered…Could one now order freshly made pizza and wings, a Slurpee, toothpaste, milk and bread, maybe even fresh produce and healthy prepared meals…and all delivered to my house? That will make the industry wake up and smell the coffee. M

7-ELEVEN CANADA HAS BEEN QUIETLY TRANSFORMING THEIR BUSINESS BY DIVERSIFYING THEIR FOOD PROGRAM WITH THE KEY COMPONENT OF THAT STRATEGY BEING THE EXPANSION OF FRESH COLD AND HOT FOOD PRODUCTS.



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How to Diversify & Thrive in the Foodservice Industry:

MENU, BUSINESS, AND PEOPLE

Running a restaurant has always been a competitive, labour intensive effort with razor-thin profit margins (the average profit margin for a restaurant in Canada is less than five per cent). While our appetite for restaurant food continues to grow—in the sectors of takeout and delivery especially, and culinary tourism—foodservice businesses are finding it harder to capitalize on consumer demand in the face of challenges: competition is no longer from within the industry alone, as food and beverage manufacturers and retail encroach on foodservice territory; demographic changes are making it tougher to recruit and retain staff; and menu preferences are becoming more specialized.

RC Show 2020 will lead the conversation on innovative and inclusive approaches to facing these challenges. You can thrive in today's quickly evolving market landscape. It's critical that restaurants learn how to adapt and "Diversify & Thrive" through a variety of means—updating human resources practices and developing robust retention strategies, exploring new menu offerings and creating unique customer experiences. In an industry that faces uncertainty and fierce competition, staying relevant through diversification is essential.

From March 1 – 3, 2020, Restaurants Canada will be holding its annual RC Show and this year's theme is "Diversify and Thrive." Attendees will learn from the biggest brands and innovators: leaders who are successful through their adoption of diversification strategies for their foodservice enterprises.





DIVERSIFYING YOUR

Business Model

One of the trends driving innovation in foodservice is the use of retail to diversify your business model and drive additional sources of revenue.

EATALY

The launch of Eataly's Toronto location in a renovated portion of the Manulife Centre at Bay and Bloor was highly anticipated. Joining Eataly's roster of over 40 food emporiums, the Toronto venture boasts over 50,000 square feet, spanning three floors and includes four full-service restaurants, seven food counters, two bars, a brewery, and a huge marketplace with over 400-plus kinds of cheese; including a mozzarella-making counter, a gelateria and a cooking classroom that hosts cooking classes for both adults and children.

The foundation of Eataly's business model is their motto of "Eat, Shop & Learn." Visitors can enjoy a sit-down meal or grab readymade meals and go on market tours with an Eataly ambassadors.

By diversifying their offerings, Eataly has provided a model that allows customers to have a unique and fully immersive food experience. **Nicola Farinetti**, CEO of Eataly and son of its founder Oscar Farinetti comments: "People always want to change and experience new things, so multi-outlet concepts like this provide a different experience every time you go in. You can come into Eataly 20 times a month and have 20 different experiences. That's what we're offering."

In addition to differentiating their business model, Eataly takes it one step further by adapting to the local



NICOLA FARINETTI

culture. This means that no Eataly store in the world is the same—every Eataly location is dedicated to a different value, and in Toronto, fittingly, it's multiculturalism.

Using customer feedback, Eataly customizes each store, offering different products and menus, demonstrating their ability to be receptive to customer feedback and learn from it, which allows them to provide a memorable customer experience.

Another strategy Eataly uses to diversify their offering is to make it a priority to develop strong and lasting partnerships with experienced and local partners to help develop exclusive consumer experiences in Toronto they have brought in local businesses such as Diana's Seafood to run the fish counter and Junction-based Indie Alehouse to run the brewery. Eataly will be speaking more on how they are expanding the consumer experience at *RC Show 2020's Leadership Conference*.

GHOST KITCHENS CANADA

George Kottas is CEO and founder of Ghost Kitchens Canada. Developing strong partnerships with both delivery services and international brands is a strategy George Kottas has used to further strengthen his restaurant business model.

Eschewing the traditional brick and mortar concept, Kottas operates a ghost or virtual restaurant. The idea came to him while he was running a restaurant called

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Bite Me Grill when approached by Uber Eats and Just Eat about providing a delivery service. "Our place was open from 7 am to 3pm every day. One day, by accident, we left our tablet menu open for orders online for 24 hours, during our closed hours and when I came in the next morning, there were 40 missed orders. That's when I realized that consumer tastes, habits and expectations are changing," he explains. He hired additional staff, and within a week was offering delivery from 3pm-midnight. Soon after, he made the shift from a retail business to a 24-hour delivery ghost kitchen, exploring additional food concepts, starting with Greek. Within six months he had gone from one breakfast restaurant to eight different restaurant concepts, all within one ghost kitchen. "No one cared that there wasn't a restaurant," he says.

Everything is ordered online, prepared by his two cooks in the ghost kitchen and delivered through online food delivery services. Customers interact only with the delivery company, which places the orders and delivers the food directly to the customer. This eliminates the need for customer service, allowing him to focus on the quality of the food.

To date, Kottas has created more than 30 different restaurant brand concepts, with diverse menus within each of those concepts. Having a commercial kitchen that can produce more than one type of cuisine is a huge benefit to running a ghost operation, and Kottas can design his menus to allow for easy food prep. A ghost kitchen also allows for easy entry into the market. "With rents going up and taxes and labour costs, it's tougher and tougher to open a restaurant," says Kottas. However, he does admit that delivery services can typically take a 30 per cent cut from every order and that staff recruiting and training challenges remain the same as those faced by traditional brick and mortar models.

He is trying to diversify even further by launching delivery services for major, highly recognizable international brands such as Cinnabon, Ben & Jerry's and Nescafé. He plans to create partnerships with 15 to 20 international brands to connect customers to the brands they love that would not normally have access to in an online delivery service.

By offering choices to customers through the diversification of their business models, both Eataly and George Kottas' have taken steps to achieve stability and longevity within an often unpredictable industry. George will be outlining his pathway to success at RC Show 2020.

DIVERSIFYING YOUR

Profit Avenues



FOOD TRUCK N' EXPERIENCE

Jason Bellissimo, owner of JB Innovative Solutions and the founder of Food Truck N' Friday couldn't agree more. Taking place on select Fridays throughout the year, each pop-up event gathers 10 of Toronto's top food trucks all in one convenient spot, usually at a primary residence in Etobicoke, although he has begun to expand to other cities. "The main importance of being in the hospitality industry is offering a hospitable experience. The main reason we've been so successful with the Food Truck N' Friday concept is that it's as if they are coming into my home, and that's the main ingredient for success to happen. It is all about the way to deliver the hospitable experience."

Bellissimo's Food Truck N' Friday model has been so successful that last year, he brought his concept to RC Show 2019 for the first time, as The Food Truck'N Experience. He works with vendors at the show to integrate brand products into the food truck experience, and the trucks then create their own menus to showcase the products. He will be running a second activation this year at RC Show 2020 where he will feature 8 to 10 new trucks in the World Pavilion featuring international flavours from arepas to Caribbean fusion cuisine.

He feels his diversified model is what brings people back: "I wanted to showcase cuisines from around the world. However, the focus always comes back to the experience. The experience must be on par with the uniqueness of the menu creation, which has to be on par with the uniqueness of the flavours, quality and taste. Menu ideation is all about confidence in the concept. Even if you change the menu every week, it's the concept that stays the same."

DIVERSIFYING YOUR

People

Understanding how to diversify your business model and food offerings to allow for an overall positive customer experience; however, it all depends on one thing: the ability to staff your operation.

Shifting demographics have exacerbated labour shortages in Canada, and this is now one of the greatest challenges currently facing the foodservice industry. This not only has an impact on the customers' experience but also on the bottom line.



SPEAKER STAGE AT RC SHOW

Bruce McAdams is associate professor for the School of Hospitality, Food, and Tourism Management at University of Guelph. He feels that the reason labour issues are so prevalent in today's foodservice industry is that not much has changed over the last 30 years. "When I graduated in 1998 and went to work at a restaurant chain, we used the same employment model back then as most restaurants do now. We hired people a certain way, and they worked certain hours and the model hasn't changed very much, but the world has changed a lot. Demographics show we do not have the young workforce we used to have; there's been a substantial increase in mental health challenges within the foodservice workplace, a seeming decline in people wanting to work in the service industry and of course the seasonality of the business."



BRUCE MCADAMS

McAdams currently spends his time focused on researching and developing sustainable restaurants and sustainable employment models. He will be part of a panel at *RC Show 2020–Addressing the Labour Crisis: How to Attract and Retain Talent.* He warns that the solution is not simple. "It's an incredibly complex problem that cannot be solved easily, and so I honestly feel that we avoid it because we have a lot of things to worry about in our industry, and this is not a fun one. It takes time, and it takes dealing with people."

Anna Chartres, also a part of the *Addressing the Labour Crisis: How to Attract and Retain Talent Panel at RC Show 2020* is the regional director of Talent and Culture Central Canada for The Fairmont Royal York and her role is to manage staff and their workplace happiness. The Fairmont Royal York sees less than 10 per cent turnover on an annual basis. "Employee engagement is one of the biggest things you can do to drive revenue. It's the number one thing we are focused on, and it's not just a human resources thing, my job is to help create the culture of the hotel."

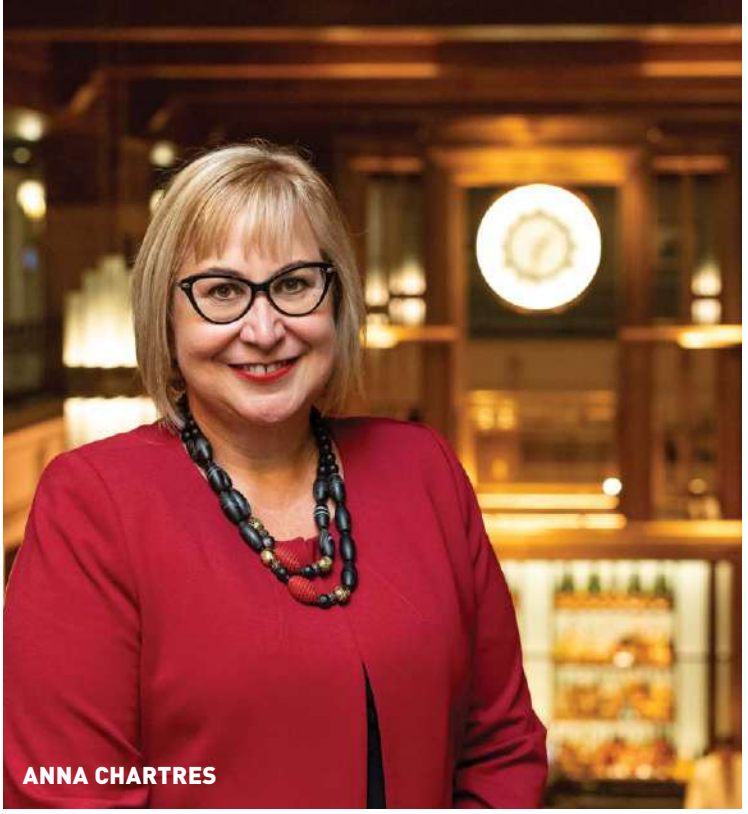
Each year all the Fairmont hotels participate in an engagement survey to help the leadership team identify the key drivers of engagement. "We sit down with our colleagues and ask what's bugging you? Then we take the feedback, and when we get the results we action plan what we can improve on in the department. It's the basis of everything we do," she says.

McAdams agrees: "All the studies show with an increase in employee engagement, productivity increases, retention increases and customer focus increases. There is a relationship between higher employee engagement and profitability."

Retention is another key strategy that McAdams focuses on through his studies. "Many of the restaurants I work with don't have any retention programs as part of their employment strategy." He explains that in the foodservice business, there are two markets: the external market which is the customers, and the internal labour market, which is the employees. "What we do as an industry is spend all our time and attention on the external market, we spend marketing dollars, focus on competitive advantage differentiation and we do nothing in the internal market for labour, or it falls to an under-resourced HR department."

As part of his sustainability work, McAdams is exploring the concept of alternative work schedules as part of retention strategies. "If we look at management schedules now, less than five

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ANNA CHARTRES

per cent of organizations have alternative work schedules, and it's been proven that employees stay with companies that have the most flexibility in their schedules." This can be difficult in the traditional restaurant model where long hours and odd days are the norms, however this is what employees are demanding. McAdams ran a study asking 350 students in Ontario studying to be a chef or work in the restaurant management industry, what schedules they would like to work, and the overwhelming response was a four, 10-hour day work week.

But what about small business owners who don't necessarily have the infrastructure to develop a robust retention program? According to Chartres from The Fairmont Royal York, "It's about creating the infrastructure. If you treat your people well, you don't have to have a big sophisticated organization behind you. If you sit down and listen to what your employees need, that's the first step of the equation. Too often, we don't. If you take care of people, they will be more loyal to you."

Court Desautels, also part of the labour panel at RC Show 2020, and the president of the Neighbourhood Group of Companies, one of a handful of certified B Corporations in Canada, has embraced the challenge of finding new and innovative ways to take care of the people who work for his restaurant group. His vision of combining great hospitality with environmental and social initiatives has led him to challenge the status quo in the traditional restaurant business model. "The status quo just doesn't work anymore. We have a stigma to break down and show that we can operate like any other business," says Desautels.

He has introduced health benefits to all full-time employees and redefined what full-time hours are—20 hours—to enable as many employees as possible to take advantage of the program. He reviews his attrition rates often to see how it correlates with the number of employees on benefits. "The higher the percentage of employees on health benefits, the lower the attrition rates," he says. "And low attrition rates leads to increase sales and increase profitability. All senior managers in his restaurants receive four weeks of vacation to start, and he also offers all employees access to a health and wellness program, an educational fund to develop themselves personally or professionally and an emergency fund. For those who travel long distances on public transportation, he supplies bus passes. "You treat your employees well, you retain your employees, they stick around for the long haul, and you build a strong team,' he says.

Taking care of people also includes ensuring the culture of the restaurant supports the needs of the employees. **Dean Sockett**, another member of RC Show labour panel and vice president of People and Culture for Keg Restaurants Ltd, began his career at the Keg as a server during his university years. After graduating, he stayed on at The Keg as a bartender until the company "approached me about becoming a manager. They asked me to try it for one year. I have been here for 40 years now, and I am not a unique story in the company." He is focused on creating and delivering a superior service culture with highly-engaged employees, and for the past 16 consecutive years Keg Restaurants has been recognized as one of the "50 Best Employers in Canada" by Aon Hewitt.

Providing professional training and development opportunities, the ability to be promoted from within to leadership roles and having leaders that will support those aspirations is a key component to the Keg's success. "Most of the leadership team has worked at a Keg restaurant, so they understand what our employees are experiencing on the front line." One of the areas The Keg has spent a lot of time focusing on is mental health within the workplace. "We provide training opportunities, so our managers are able to recognize and deal with an employee who may be experiencing mental health



COURT DESAUTELS



DEAN SOCKETT

challenges. Ensuring employees feel safe in their environment is of the utmost importance to us."

In addition to the internal challenges faced by the restaurant industry, there are many external factors such as changing demographics within the workforce that put a huge amount of pressure on restaurants and their ability to maintain a robust staff.

"Twenty years ago I had a stack of resumes to go through when hiring," says McAdams, "and now I'm dealing with companies that are coming to see me because there's no stack of resumes, they don't have 10 people waiting to call when they have a vacancy." Even if restaurants offer a strong leadership culture and attractive benefits and retention plans, often, people are not interested in working long and odd hours. The daily demands of day to day life take precedent, making it difficult for potential employees to commit to the distinctive requirements of the restaurant industry.

Whether it's culture, leadership, retention strategies or tackling constantly changing external forces, the road to overcoming labour shortages is complex and will require focus and dedication.

DIVERSIFYING YOUR *Menu*

Telling the story of food through the customer experience can also be applied to the concept of diversifying the menu. Customers' food choices are changing and evolving, providing an opportunity for operators who choose to adapt to shine.

Many of the trends around menu development have a lot to do with social initiatives and the importance of reflecting the social initiatives of the community you are representing. "I look at food as if it's a privilege and think about how many ways I can diversify that same product, so I've minimized my cost but enhanced my guests' experience, says **Bill Alexander**, Indigenous Cuisine Curator and Advisor at RC Show 2020. He is also the chair of the Indigenous Culinary of Associated Nations, executive chef at Grey Eagle Resort and Casino and consulting chef for WestJet. It's not always about changing up a menu, he explains, "When I'm launching a new menu, I go out to the community, and I don't necessarily look at people's menu choices, I look at their experiences. When we talk about diversifying your menu, the menu should reflect your theme or be a representation of the guests that will become regulars in your restaurant. Customers drive menus, and it's not only about the food but how customers are responding to that."

Bill grew up in Northern Ontario and Quebec and is a member of the Ahkwesásne Nation. Being Indigenous,

↣ CONTINUED ON PAGE 52

food has always been a very important part of his culture, as is the relationship to the land. Offering up traditional Indigenous food allows him to share the story of his culture. "We need to understand there's no separation between food and culture. People are now learning a lot about my culture through our food, which is making our food more intriguing and our culture more accessible. We need to stop looking at food as simply nourishment because it is so much more. Food is the most powerful conduit I have to getting people to learn more about the Indigenous culture."

Like Eataly's approach, Alexander understands that it's the overall experience that differentiates. In his culinary program, chefs are out on the floor, to make the culinary experience as interactive as possible. "We should be able to leave you with a couple of bits of information even if you didn't ask. This comes across in the industry as a step up in the customer service side of things. I want people to come in, have a compelling culinary experience and leave the restaurant knowing more than when they came in."



BILL ALEXANDER

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Extending that experience to include farmers and suppliers can also help distinguish your operation. Alexander often brings in farmers when doing a tasting menu to engage with guests and tell the story of where the food came from. "Farmers have diversified themselves over the years—now they are salespeople and we are all stronger through collaboration. It has made me change my social responsibility with my partnerships."

The key according to Alexander is to look at food differently. "I always say it's amenity versus identify. Food has always been an amenity, he explains, "but now food deserves its own identity in this country—we have to stop treating our own businesses like people just have to eat and that's why we exist."

Sources:
Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2018
Food Service Facts, 2019, Restaurants Canada
Food Service Facts, 2019, Restaurants Canada
The Future of Canada's Tourism Sector: Shortage to Resurface as Labour Markets Tighten
OpenTable – The Business of Eataly: How Restaurants and Retail Drive Revenue Together
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I WANT WHAT THEY'RE HAVING



FOOD IN THE INSTAGRAM AGE

BY CAELI MAZARA

In the summer of 2019, a story about an ice cream truck in Los Angeles, California, went viral after the owner, Joe Nicchi, posted a sign that read, "Influencers pay double." He was tired of being asked for free ice cream by customers who promised to feature his truck in their next Instagram post. "I'll put it on my Instagram" is the new "You'll be paid in exposure." But does it work? Nicchi is in the minority when it comes to business owners, many of whom jump at the chance to be on the feed of someone with a few thousand, or maybe a few million subscribers. Social media influencers often specialize, whether they push handbags, luxury hotels, or lattes, and there is no shortage of them devoted to the food scene. Their mission is to capture the fabulous and photogenic: layered ice creams piled into mason jars, sprouting biscotti and roasted marshmallows, hamburger patties dripping with barbecue sauce, sandwiched between charcoal-black brioche buns, whole grilled octopus served on warmed slate. With dozens of food-focused influencers in Canada, with millions upon millions of followers internationally, this is a marketing tool that has not gone unnoticed.

Do an internet search for the most Instagram-able restaurants in Vancouver, and Banter Room is sure to place high the list. Opened in 2017, it's a sunny, spacious spot in the Yaletown neighbourhood, and with its Los Angeles-inspired design, it quickly became an Instagram hotspot. The restaurant is done in light wood tones, with exposed brick and brightly-patterned furniture—the perfect backdrop for their just-as-photogenic food. Jasmine Mooney is a managing partner, and she and the rest of the team had Instagram in mind when they considered the style they wanted.

"When we opened Banter Room, we wanted to create an environment that Vancouver hasn't really seen," says Mooney. "We wanted there to be colour everywhere."

The Banter Room team wanted a menu that was just as exciting. Included in the drinks menu are Colossal

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Cocktails, sharable between four people. The biggest hit, though, is a champagne vending machine, which Mooney says was brought in specifically for the Instagram crowd.

"People are always posting about it," says Mooney. "There are people that come to us just for the vending machine because they saw it on Instagram. It has been a strong tool for us—and it's free marketing."

Their success inspired them to open a second venue earlier this year, this one in Vancouver's Entertainment District.

"For the new location," Mooney recalls, "We really went for 'How can we make this even more Instagram-able?'"

The answer was the Hotel Belmont, a vivid pink building with a retro vibe that's decked out with neon signs, flamboyant wallpapers and even a bowling lane. Since opening four months ago, Hotel Belmont's Instagram account has already amassed 12,000 followers.

"When people talk to me," says Mooney, "they go, 'I haven't been to your new spot yet, but I see it on Instagram every single day.'"

Executive chef and culinary director, Mike Rose, makes a menu to go with the statement design that includes truffle parmesan fries, slow-cooked ribs and a rainbow layer cake filled with candy.

"We're always going with what the trends are and what people are asking for," says Mooney. "Every few months there's some new trend. Cauliflower...where did that come from? Or poke bowls, all of a sudden they're all over North America." (Hotel Belmont offers cauliflower bites and three varieties of poke bowl.)

Banter Room and Hotel Belmont are far from the only business to tap the marketing potential of social media influencers. Jordan Agh is the owner of Tokyo Hot Fried Chicken, located in downtown Toronto. Agh's fried chicken recipe, which combines Nashville and Japanese takes on the dish, was a hit three years in a row at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE), where it was named the best seller every year.

"I pretty much grew up at the CNE," says Agh. He started working in the food section of the Exhibition when he was 15. "I'd say I'm more of a food carnie than a chef," he jokes.

Tokyo Hot got a permanent location downtown this past spring, and the traction on social media was immediate. Within 20 days of the opening, *BlogTO* named Agh's chicken sandwich one of the best in the city, and Agh received a visit from fellow foodie (and personal hero) Bob Blumer.

"We're located on the fifth floor above a couple of bars," says Agh. "So people have to look for us. Social media is really helpful with that."

When his company started out at the CNE, Agh didn't really bother with social media accounts, but after a CNE-hosted media event where he got to rub shoulders with some of Toronto's biggest influencers, he started to realize the power it had.

"We understand how crucial social media is," he says, "to capitalize on our own age group especially. [The entire Tokyo Hot team is under the age of 30.] Social media has been what has gotten us out there."

Just like the ice cream truck in California, both Agh and Mooney are familiar with influencer requests for free stuff.

"People will call me up and say they want food for them and their friends," says Agh. "I'm confused about what the benefit for me will be. One person is okay if they have a good following, but five people?" He is confused as well about the hesitance to support an up-and-coming small business. His words are echoed by Joe Nicchi, who couldn't understand why someone wouldn't pay just four dollars for an ice cream cone.

"It's a bit of an awkward thing sometimes when it comes to this world of influencers," admits Mooney. "What does it take to be an influencer? I turn down people's requests [for free stuff] all the time. We've had influencer parties before, and it's very interesting to see the analytics when it comes to social media: how you're growing, who's com-

WE UNDERSTAND HOW CRUCIAL SOCIAL MEDIA IS... TO CAPITALIZE ON OUR OWN AGE GROUP ESPECIALLY. THE ENTIRE TOKYO HOT TEAM IS UNDER THE AGE OF 30.



menting, who's following you, who's posting about you. It's a different world now."

What does it take to be an influencer? The Influence Agency in Toronto works with a roster of some 10,000 influencers, mostly from Instagram and YouTube. Noah Parker, the director of marketing and operations, weighs in: "By definition, an influencer is someone who has sway over other individuals," he says. "So if you look at what the threshold of follower-ship that deems someone an influencer is, there's a range. If you're looking [at] an industry that's more niche, there might be a smaller follower account, but it could command a higher value. Typically, we work with influencers with a minimum of 10,000 followers."

The Influence Agency opened two years ago after noticing the trend of influencer marketing emerging in the United States. The company is headquartered in Toronto, but works with clients across Canada and the US, with a few clients in Europe. Parker manages most of the hospitality campaigns, which are mainly run in one of two ways: a large number of influencers go into a restaurant, bar or event to create a burst of activity on social media; or a number of influencers are sent over a stretch of time, so content is popping up regularly.

Influence is a commodity, and Parker, Mooney and Agh all know it well.

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS ENORMOUS POWER IN OUR MODERN WORLD, AND HARNESSING THAT POWER TO GROW A BUSINESS IS A MATTER OF SKILL.

"People pay attention to it," says Mooney. "You know, 'I saw it on Instagram…I want what they're having.'" M





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2. Source: The Nilson Report # 1128 (March 2018). American Express transaction size derived as Canada year-end purchase volume divided by year-end purchase transactions. Average Non-American Express transaction equals $71 US ($92 CAD), includes Visa and MasterCard credit cards, and excludes Interac and debit volume and transactions. Purchase volume converted to Canadian dollars by dividing US figures by 0.771040667 (the average for the year, http://www.x-rates.com/average/?from=CAD&to=USD&amount=1.00&year=2017)

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‘Meat’ the butcher.

Your local culinary legend

BY SHAWN GOLDBERG



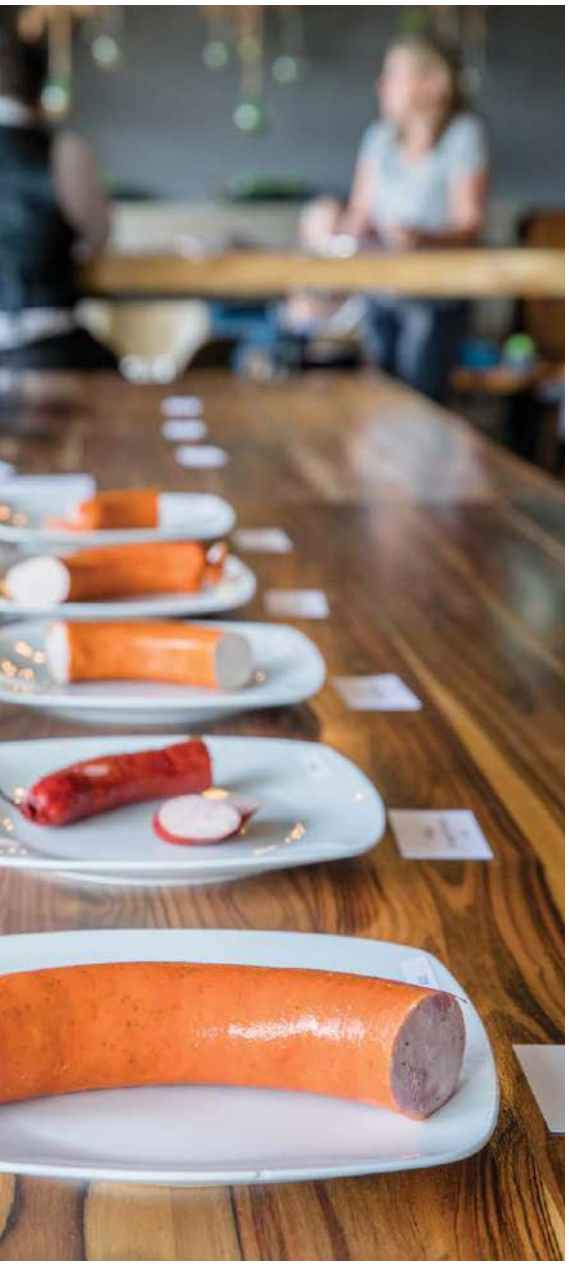
Sustainable, locally and environmentally produced meat, where butchers are the new culinary celebrities and restaurants now put access to great meat processors on equal footing with making sure their customers have great experiences.

This year, Ontario Independent Meat Processors (OIMP) held their annual, industry-only meat competition, which featured 24 companies from across Ontario representing 155 products competing for top honours in 17 product categories, making it the largest competition of its kind in Canada. Bringing together restaurateurs to connect directly with local butchers, farmers and meat processors, it presented a free flowing discussion—along with lots of tasting—about sustainability practices and direct partnerships with local meat processors across the country. “I connect with local processors, because I consider myself one,” explains Emily Richards, a cookbook author whose career has taken her from restaurant and hotel kitchens, to Food Network cooking shows as a celebrity chef. Richards makes her own sausages, so she knows firsthand the hard work and energy that goes into making homemade meats. “To me, it’s always amazing to see the variety that the local processors are working on, and that this competition helps me see what’s happening on a larger scale, and what’s being introduced to local markets.”

Fina Scroppo, also a cookbook author, grew up processing cured meats with family and friends. She feels that after moving away from that type of communal food-processing-based activity, the pendulum has swung back. “There are now farmers and processors who are using local products, and packaging them up in a way that brings us back to a time when it was just pure flavour and goodness, and it was shared with our community.” Scroppo loves that we’re coming back to a time where that is now possible, and where butchers are now also bringing in flavours that are both innovative, creative and infused with their diverse heritages. The relationship between farmers and

↣ CONTINUED ON PAGE 60

> “THERE ARE NOW FARMERS AND PROCESSORS WHO ARE USING LOCAL PRODUCTS, AND PACKAGING THEM UP IN A WAY THAT BRINGS US BACK TO A TIME WHEN IT WAS JUST PURE FLAVOUR AND GOODNESS, AND IT WAS SHARED WITH OUR COMMUNITY.”



> “THE BENEFITS OF BOTH THE DAILY RENTAL AND INCUBATION SUITES FOR PROCESSING IS THAT IT ALLOWS FOOD COMPANIES TO GET INTO THE MARKETPLACE WITHOUT HAVING TO SPEND A LARGE AMOUNT OF THEIR FINANCES ON CAPITAL. IT ALLOWS THOSE COMPANIES TO FOCUS ON THEIR MARKET, AND THEN GENERATE REVENUE.”

restaurants is what’s driving this change. Richards, who also teaches cooking classes, goes through the Ontario Independent Meat Processors association to reach out to local trotters, where they’re making their own unique products, and being able to use their products out in the community. Working with them, she’s able to create something new. “A lot of the local processors, especially the farms, are willing to do that. Not only do they want to get their product out, but they want people to experience great food and answer questions about their food from their communities.”

Shannon Hood-Niefer, is a Food Scientist and VP of Innovation and Technology at Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre, where they offer independent meat processors rental facilities and incubation suites, where companies come in to lease a larger space to manufacture their product. “The benefits of both the daily rental and incubation suites for processing is that it allows food companies to get into the marketplace without having to spend a large amount of their finances on capital. It allows those companies to focus on their market, and then generate revenue.” They work with companies of all sizes, including small local manufacturers, assisting them with technical services and product and process development. She explains that a number of her clients wouldn’t be in business without the Food Centre. Apart from their processing support services, they also help connect them with ingredient suppliers, as well as retail and foodservice outlets. One example



that sticks out as a success story was the Food Centre’s facilitating a province-wide distribution of a local meat processor’s product. “In Canada, you cannot ship meat products across provincial borders without it coming from a federally registered facility. Drake Meats, which operates in Saskatchewan, sped up operations in our incubation suite, and with our assistance, they’re now manufacturing products for sale inter-provincially.” It’s a costly and logistically time consuming endeavour, and with the Food Centre’s support, Drake Meats has been able to build up revenue, focus on their product, and eventually, as Shannon points out, “graduate from the Food Centre.”

Over in Lillooet, British Columbia, Tristan and Aubryn Banwell run Spray Creek Ranch, farming with a philosophy that is rooted in regenerative agriculture. It’s a small, diversified, certified organic and Animal Welfare Approved ranch, which produces diverse meats for the local market. They raise cattle, pigs, chicken and turkeys, and process all of their poultry on site. “When you get into



the small scale, organic, regenerative meat production, you're going to be marketing to a really limited sub-set of restaurants. It feels like we're part of the same community." Tristen chairs the local Agriculture and Food society, and is planning on a familiarization tour, bringing out chefs and food writers to connect small farms with opportunities to market themselves to restaurants in their region. Many chefs also source their meats at the local farmers market, looking to connect directly with regional farmers, building their personal relationships. "The type of farming that we're doing is a different way to look at producing food. It's going back to an era when economies were more localized." Rebuilding the soil, not using toxic inputs and chemicals, and committing Spray Creek Ranch to third party approval, such as being certified organic and Animal Welfare Approved. "You take those practices that are working for our land and the welfare of our animals, and you add on the layer of working to regenerate our social situation in our community and economy, trying to create more jobs and more opportunities for other people to farm." Simply put, Spray Creek Ranch is providing local markets with diverse meats processed with trusted values and unparalleled quality. The end result is the best product that you can get. "When I put a chicken in someone's hand, I guarantee that will be the best quality chicken that person has ever had."

Jason Parsons is the executive chef at Peller Estates Winery Restaurant (you can read more about chef Parsons in this issue on page 18). He feels that the key for consumers today is traceability, knowing where your food is coming from. "It's not just a chicken that's in a packet. Where is that chicken coming from, how was it raised and under what conditions? It's a matter of making a commitment and sticking to it."

Hood-Niefer at the Food Centre struggles with the vilification of other industries in the food and agriculture sector. "I strongly believe in the variety of choice. We know from nutrition historically, we need to consume a variety of food. It's the variety that makes you healthy."

DIG IN

To get in touch with meat processors in your region of Canada, please contact the association nearest you!

Ontario Independent Meat Processors
oimp.ca

BC of Abattoirs Association
bcabattoirs.org

Small Scale Food Processor Association
ssfpa.net

Alberta Food Processors Association
afpa.com

Food and Beverage Manitoba
foodbeveragemb.ca

Saskatchewan Food Processors Association
agwest.sk.ca

Food and Beverage Atlantic
atlanticfood.ca

Food Processing Council of Quebec
conseiltaq.com

Food Processors of Canada
foodprocessorsofcanada.ca

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How Digital Signage Technology drives the Canadian QSR Industry

FROM SAMSUNG ELECTRONICS CANADA



The Canadian quick service restaurant (QSR) experience has come a long way from its humble beginnings. Aside from the delicious evolution of food and beverage menus, the ways in which businesses are communicating their offerings and facilitating their transactions is also developing rapidly. Self-serve ordering, mobile pick-up and home delivery have revolutionized the customer experience, and in turn positively impacted sales, in-store customer counts and operational processes.

Next generation technology has been a major player in these advancements for QSRs, allowing them to be more efficient. More specifically, digital signage has become a key tool in driving sales and boosting customer experiences in the foodservice industry, from sharing menu information to highlighting promotions. Digital display technology is no longer strictly found behind the counter—it's seen throughout the restaurant, in store-front windows and throughout the drive-thru, marking all major decision points for new and returning diners. In order to remain relevant as these changes continue, business decision-makers must rely on both digital and interactive signage—on the front lines and behind the counter.

Digital displays offer efficient, adaptable communication opportunities

Over the past few years, operators in the Canadian foodservice industry have adopted digital signage management systems and display technology to communicate menu items, new products and promotions on digital menu boards above and behind the counter. They have also implemented digital displays to pre-sell and promote specials, as well as raise awareness of the company's community contributions and recruit new full-time and part-time employees.

The most prominent use of digital signage is the array of menus behind ordering counters. Digital menu boards, such as the Samsung SMART Signage QBR/QMR Series, provide the ability to change menus instantly, without having them printed. Thanks to digital signage technology, changes to menus are scheduled and automated to enhance convenience.

With the VMR-U Video Wall Series from Samsung, operators can display dynamic menu content with visual impact to grab customers' attention and provide them with key details. This efficient system on chip (SoC) embedded video wall can easily transform screens from displaying standalone content to operating as one cohesive unit, without the need for additional hardware.

Digital signage works in any conditions

The recent wave of digital display adoption has positively impacted outdoor drive-thru

↣ CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

areas, with daylight-readable screens replacing printed pre-sell and menu posters. With outdoor digital signage, such as the Samsung Outdoor Display OHF Series, changes take a matter of minutes, as messages are fine-tuned and promotions catered to consumers rolling into drive-thru lanes. Outdoor displays from Samsung feature a slim depth (85 mm.) design and the added convenience of an embedded power box. They also boast durability, flexibility and 24/7 performance, even in extreme temperatures.

Moreover, in a study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Samsung, digital signage in drive-thru lanes decreases drive-thru times, reduces food waste due to improved order accuracy, and reduces the labour costs of printing, shipping and putting new posters in place.

Because of the enhanced, personalized customer experience digital menu boards bring, restaurants are in a position to upgrade their old displays and start reaping significant financial benefits from these new digital displays.

Self-serve ordering, mobile pick-up and home delivery have revolutionized the customer experience, and in turn, positively impacted sales, in-store customer counts and operational processes.

Interactive digital marketing solutions throughout any restaurant space

Putting a bright digital display in a storefront can be an effective way to market to passersby and drive foot traffic through the door. However, using that technology can come with a caveat: screens look great from the outside, but staff and visitors on the inside see the back end of a display or its enclosure.

That is where the dual-sided LCD screens from Samsung can come in as a solution. The OMN-D Series from Samsung is a dual display with screens on both sides. The window-facing screen features bright visuals and prominent positioning, providing those passing by with further motivation to enter the restaurant. Once inside, indoor-facing displays enhance the dining experience with relevant content, such as menus or promotions. This single display reduces equipment and installation costs, increasing operational efficiency, compared to installing two separate displays.

For sports and entertainment themed restaurants, the Extreme Narrow Bezel Video Wall UHF-E/UMH-E Series from Samsung lets diners enjoy an immersive, near-seamless viewing experience for catching every play in the game. These video walls feature an extreme narrow-bezel (1.7mm) that produces a near-seamless picture across multiple screens without interruption.

Display technology and the evolution of quick service dining

Canadian foodservice operators are tailoring their technology investments to meet consumers' heightened demand for a more personalized, modern dining experience. Hitting the right notes, as customers' expectations continue to grow. Aside from the care and consideration put into consumable offering choices and menu development, businesses have the opportunity to leverage digital display to stay ahead of the curve and competitive.

Indeed, the future of QSR is rooted in a technology-driven experience reflected in digital displays, both inside and out. As the number one worldwide leader in digital signage for the 10th consecutive year (as measured by unit sales), Samsung is committed to transforming digital signage and providing Canadian retailers an innovative display solution as a natural extension of their retail environment.[1]

For more information on Samsung Digital Display solutions, visit samsung.com/ca/business

Featured Partner

[1]According to recently released data from IHS Markit, the leading provider of digital signage market data. https://news.samsung.com/uk/samsung-marks-decade-as-global-leader-in-digital-signage




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