MENU

CANADA'S FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE

RC Show
Restaurants Canada
THE HOSPITALITY EVENT OF THE YEAR

~ HIGHLIGHTS ~

AND HOW TO ACCESS THE BEST OF SHOW!

AIN'T *no* HALF STEPPIN'

1 ON 1 WITH TREVOR LUI, Serial Entrepreneur + Restaurants Canada Social Advocacy Award Winner

Q&A with the Honourable Randy Boissonnault

MINISTER OF TOURISM OF CANADA & ASSOCIATE MINISTER OF FINANCE



$18.95
Summer 2022
menumag.ca
40009977


HERE FOR GOOD
125
GORDON FOOD SERVICE
1897
HERE FOR GOOD
For 125 years, our people, our customers, our suppliers, our partners and our communities have worked together for good. We conduct good business and bring good people together over good food.
Our shared experiences are what create the Gordon Food Service® story. Every order, every delivery, every meal.
Here to serve you at gfs.ca.

Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This year's RC Show brought more than 20,000 hospitality professionals together, joining us in person and virtually, to celebrate and ignite the industry's REVIVAL. The RC Show brings together Canada's largest economic sector to shop, taste, learn, connect and grow their business. Leading suppliers were showcased alongside local and global experts, who shared insights, inspiration, revenue-generating and cost-saving ideas.

Three days of connecting with industry professionals, each learning and tasting new products and hearing from experts across multiple panels made this year's RC Show our industry's highlight of the year. After the past two years, the energy and the excitement of being back together could be felt across the entire show floor. If you missed this year's RC Show, you're invited to watch the entire lineup on our new 365 Marketplace. While you're there, you can also find hundreds of products and services as well as profiles of the exhibitors who were at the show. If you are an industry supplier, be sure to also create your business profile, so those shopping for products and services can find you!

This summer sees the return of festivals and events that were missed over the past two years. As the weather invites us to enjoy patios and dining out with friends and family, the team at Restaurants Canada continues to work to address key issues in our industry, including labour and increasing food costs.

On the cover of this edition of MENU, is Trevor Lui, this year's Restaurants Canada Social Advocate Award winner. Inside you'll read about his new venture, how he integrates technology into customer service and how he pays tribute to his heritage and community. As well, we speak with The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, Canada's Minister of Tourism, about his thoughts on what the foodservice industry means for tourism.

In this issue, we also review the highlights of this year's RC Show, including a discussion with digital media experts who provide insight on how to maximize your digital presence, and an in-depth conversation with this year's competitors and organizers about the value of competitions in our industry as well as a much-deserved thank-you to this year's hospitality student volunteers.

As we look back on this year's event, we look forward to next year's RC Show at the Enercare Centre in Toronto, from April 10-12, 2023.



Tianna Goguen
Editor

Summer 2022
Volume 7 Number 3

Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

Do you have comments or a story for us? If so, please email menueditor@restaurantscanada.org.

7.3

MENU is published four times per year by Restaurants Canada

Managing Editor
Tianna Goguen

Contributors
The Hon.
Randy Boissonnault
Meeru Dhalwala
Trevor Lui
Shannon Murphy
Chris Szego

Editorial & Creative Direction
Arable Brand Communications

Circulation Inquiries, Changes and Updates
members@restaurantscanada.org
1-800-387-5649

Advertising Sales
Laurie Dawe
1-800-387-5649, ext. 4233
menu@restaurantscanada.org

© Copyright 2022. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without written permission of the publisher.

Mailing Address
Restaurants Canada
1155 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M6J 1J4
T: 416-923-8416
Toll-free: 1-800-387-5649
F: 416-923-1450
info@restaurantscanada.org

Twitter
@RestaurantsCA
@MENUmagCA

Instagram:
MENUmagCA

HST Registration No. #
106866460 RT0001

Subscription price:
CANADIAN PRICE:
$75 per year; most single issues $18.95.

Publication Mail Agreement
No. 40009977
ISSN 2371-4883

Stronger Together
Thank you to our corporate sponsors.

PLATINUM

GOLD

SILVER

bubly™
sparkling water
beverage

your meal's next bestie



Trademarks are property of Portfolio Concentrate Solutions UC. Used under licence. ©PepsiCo Canada ULC, 2022



13



21



35

contents



ON THE COVER:
Toronto serial "restaurentrepreneur" Trevor Lui finds his moment with Superfresh.

RC SHOW 2022

13 RC Show 2022 Highlights

21 Why do Foodservice & Hospitality Competitions Matter?
Chris Szego

25 Bocuse D'Or
Chris Szego

27 Star Power: Michelin Guide comes to Canada
MENU magazine

28 The Future of Hospitality Steps Up to the Plate: RC Show Volunteers
MENU magazine

31 Juice That's Worth the Squeeze: How to get more from industry events
MENU magazine

THE FRONT

6 Being Trevor Lui
MENU magazine

THE CONVERSATION

44 Q&A with The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, Minister of Tourism
MENU magazine

THE MAIN COURSE

35 Marketing at the Speed of Culture: Digital Trends, Data & Social Media for the Industry
Shannon Murphy

50 Giving Foodservice Workers What They Want..and Deserve
Chris Szego







YOUR STORIES

58 Chipotle Mexican Grill: Growing Fast Casual in Canada
Chris Szego

62 Colouring Outside the Lines: Q&A with Meeru Dhalwali
MENU magazine

MARKETPLACE

56 **BUNN** brings next-gen technology to beverage service to Canadian foodservice; **Sysco** helps restaurants manage supply chain challenges and offers flexibility, selection and service; **Vizzy Hard Seltzer** is now available in draught; **JUST Egg** looks, cooks and tastes just like chicken eggs; **Beyond Chicken Tenders** from Beyond Meat are a tasty, plant based menu option; and **365 Marketplace** powered by Restaurants Canada is the new go-to digital platform to connect with the best suppliers and services, training and webinars for Canadian foodservice and hospitality.

PARTNER CONTENT

39 SkipTheDishes
How to Leverage Digital Marketing to Attract New Diners & Boost Your Brand: TikTok, Google and Meta

MENU



Being TREVOR LUI



This year's Restaurants Canada Social Advocate Award was presented to Trevor Lui in recognition of his long-standing commitment to redefining and creating a more equitable and representative foodservice ecosystem. Lui's success with restaurants like Superfresh, Yatai and Baobird, the launch of Quell, an agency focusing on showcasing and elevating BIPOC culinary talent, as well as his Taste Canada Award-shortlisted *The Double Happiness Cookbook: 88 Feel-Good Recipes and Food Stories*, allows Lui to do what he loves while opening doors and creating space for others.

Before the doors open, as the kitchen starts to prepare for another busy evening, Trevor Lui stops for a moment in the middle of Superfresh, the new Asian night market concept restaurant in Toronto. Since the Chinese dragons ceremoniously welcomed the first customers in May with a dance down Bloor Street, diners have lined up, often for hours, to experience what Lui and his partners James Lee, Jae Pak and Dave Choi have created.

The buzz and excitement surrounding Superfresh represents the ongoing shift in the industry - to truly represent culture and food, without sacrificing authenticity and without apology. This shift is in part due to passionate leaders like Lui, who accept, acknowledge and celebrate their heritage and use their influence to educate and to empower, but also due to a larger audience who sees the world through a global lens, welcoming the opportunity to experience something new, or something that reminds them of home.

As the lights flicker on in the 4,000 square foot space and the music starts to spin, Lui looks around and says, "I think it's important to understand how we built this place is a tribute to what we grew up with. It wasn't until these last couple of years that we started to appreciate what we have as Asians, and what it means to grow up as an Asian immigrant in Western society."

Growing up as the only son of immigrants from Hong Kong, Lui was taught–and lived–the standard ethos of those who chose to leave their home in search of a better future: work hard and be happy. Success is viewed as a linear path beginning with family, working hard and doing well at school, leading to a well-paying and respectful career. Lui had other plans. "It was bad enough I dropped out of



2022 Restaurants Canada Social Advocate Award



> "I think it's important to understand how we built this place is a tribute to what we grew up with."

university as the first one in my generation in the family to make the jump to post secondary. I didn't want to be a lawyer, doctor or accountant. But then I left the corporate job to create my own environment and a place where the ceiling isn't determined by anyone but me."

Through multiple successful (and several unsuccessful) restaurants, the opening of a culinary BIPOC talent agency, developing a line of retail goods and writing a cookbook, Lui has been driven to tell stories and create experiences that help people draw the line between food and culture. Bringing it all together in an experience that's both authentic and urban, delicious and memorable is the throughline of Lui's personality. From the old-school hip-hop playlists and pun-filled drink names at Kanpai Snack Bar, to the basketball jerseys hanging from the laundry lines at Superfresh and the colours and styles chosen for his brands, there's a style and vibe that quietly marks it as a Trevor Lui creation. This brand ethos is mirrored in the food. "If you look at my catering menus, they're nothing like you would see from a traditional catering company or hotel. You'll get pancit, beef patties, empanadas, baos. It's a reflection of who I am, growing up in Rexdale and seeing all this delicious, multicultural food and experiencing different cultures. If you don't like what we serve, I'm okay with that. But this is who I am."

Part of who Lui is includes providing opportunities for the next generation of hospitality professionals. For years, he has partnered with the culinary arts program led by Chef Keith Hoare at Thistletown Collegiate, a high school in his hometown of Rexdale, Ontario. High school students who have a passion for the industry work on different initiatives with a goal of experiencing international culinary travel. When Quell was launched, soon followed the launch of a bursary and mentorship program that focuses on the development of students as a way to reshape the industry and help eliminate the systemic inequities that exist not only in the industry, but in the larger ecosystem. Quell is now focused on working with like-minded businesses to develop incubator kitchens and practical learning forums for communities that traditionally have less access to such resources.

In early 2020 as news of a new virus found in China began to spread, there was a corresponding rise of anti-Asian racism, hate crimes and xenophobia. "There was a stigma of being Asian during COVID," says Lui. "Most businesses suffered during COVID, and restaurants are on the top of that list. But if you were an Asian-owned business, then the loss was much greater and on a deeper level. No one thinks about the compression felt by Asian owners and how much was lost. Chinatown was a shell of itself months before the first lockdown was imposed and, in many aspects, still has not recovered."

Instead of retreating, Lui looked to celebrate. Superfresh is a showcase of Asian culture, including common elements of Asian households used as décor. "Laundry racks, fluorescent garbage cans, baskets where we strained our clothes, taking your shoes off at the door and offering slippers, all of these things that we suppressed, we now celebrate," says Lui. All of these are conversation starters in the restaurant, with many people recalling memories of these items in their homes growing up, and what traditions they still hold onto. "There's a three-week argument on TikTok right now about the "Please remove your shoes"

> "It wasn't until these last couple of years that we started to appreciate what we have as Asians, and what it means to grow up as an Asian immigrant kid in Western society."











sign. But this is a good thing. "Through COVID and seeing all of this anti-Asian racism and hate crimes made me take stock of who I am – an Asian who lives in Canada. To bring the things in our homes into the open and to have conversations about them where people get to hear our stories and learn about our homes; I'm all for it."

Through Superfresh, Lui and his partners have also created a cultural hub with community programming to showcase Asian creatives and events in Toronto. From hosting "Freshfest" in support of the Canadian Chinese Youth Athletic Association's Celebrity Classic to holding ticketed live events in support of Asian Gold Ribbon, an anti-Asian-racism not-for-profit, Superfresh is not just a restaurant but a gathering place where all are welcome.

Superfresh is doing things differently. For instance, there are no reservations. "The risk is too high. There are so many no-shows; not everyone shows up at the same time. Some people don't show with a reservation. Every single seat has a value to it." COVID-19 has brought on other changes. "Customers are not always right," states Lui. "To a certain extent, of course, there are things that go wrong over the course of a meal, but you won't dictate to us how we run our business. You won't be rude to our staff. If you want to go online and complain about us without talking to us, that's your thing. But we prefer you talk to us so we can fix it while you're here. But we don't subscribe to an old-school mindset of the customer anymore. We've suffered so much through COVID to be here today."

After being seated by the host, customers are assigned a number and a placard with a table number. "You scan the QR code, you see all the menus on your phone, and you tap on what you want, and then we bring it to you. It's a little like starting a tab. You can split the tab, you can pay for someone else's bill, all from your phone." It's also a way for customers to get served faster. "So, if you want a second drink, you just go into the app and press another Margarita and you'll get your drink within five minutes. We all know that post COVID, there's a challenge to get people back into food service. This helps us with labour." The feedback from customers has been overwhelmingly positive. "They're happy they don't have to chase down a server for another drink or dish or wait at the bar. Sure, there are some people who prefer a menu, but when they get to see how ordering works, or that they can still get recommendations from their host and ask questions about the menu, they're okay." But, the reality is no one knows if anything will actually stick. "I'm certain somewhere along the line, we will need to make a shift or two to adapt to our customer and environment again."

Developed by beverage expert Evelyn Chick, the Superfresh cocktail offering is inspired by Asian flavours and puts a twist on classic drinks. These drinks are on tap at Superfresh. "By putting our signature drinks on tap, customers don't have the wait for their



> I left the corporate job to create my own environment and a place where the ceiling isn't determined by anyone but me."



gratuitous Trevor Lui sneaker pic

drinks," says Lui. "The other benefit is that our drinks are consistent. They're not dependent on who the bartender is any given night. Our staff can pour a drink on tap and garnish it properly." But this also helps mitigate the ongoing labour shortage. "I think that we probably save on at least one bartender during the evening by having our feature drinks on tap. While we were more focused on efficiency and consistency, this has been a benefit during a labour shortage." As well, Superfresh is home to one of the coveted Suntory Toki Highball machines, which dispenses chilled whisky and soda for highballs.

On Superfresh's Instagram account, you'll find the weekly password to access the Korean speakeasy in the back. You tell the host the password and you'll be led to a secret room, with a distinctly different ambiance from the rest of the space. Sam Cha (which in Korean means - third round of drinks and that you're in it for the night) has a separate food and beverage menu, seats 25 and is often just as busy. The success that's followed Lui is not by accident. While most of it is due to his unrelenting work ethic, some of it comes down to timing. "When I think back even 10 years ago, we would not have been able to build a Superfresh and to have the reception it has had. We could not have built a PR strategy like we do now. Reach was much harder and traditional with less outlets. You had radio. Newspapers. TV if you were lucky. You had to pick up the phone, send an email and convince someone to come out." With social media, things are different. "Word of mouth from our customers, most of whom are on social media, or having a space that is interesting and different helps," states Lui. "It's a very different approach from what we've done in the past, and more restaurants can take advantage of it."

Lui believes that the self-reflection that came out of COVID and the rise of anti-Asian sentiment has made his resolve to bring people together through shared food and experiences even stronger. Looking around Superfresh, Lui says, "How do we cross over? There's a lot of tongue in cheek references here, some of it based on trauma that we've experienced growing up – comments about our food, our icons, or fake luxury goods. But really, this place is our way to pay our respects and acknowledge those who paved the way."

Let us celebrate 20 years together!

La Tablée des Chefs invites you to an exciting and flavorful evening at the luxurious Fairmont Royal York, to celebrate this great adventure and to recognize the support of all those who have generously contributed to our success so far.

This unique gourmet experience, with renowned Toronto chefs, will allow you to enjoy a special evening while supporting our mission: feed and educate.

TORONTO
FAIRMONT ROYAL YORK
OCTOBER 17, 2022



jW Foster
HOST CHEF
Fairmont Royal York



Tony Chapman
MASTER OF CEREMONIES

BOOK YOUR PACKAGE

www.tableedeschefs.org

La Tablée des Chefs

It has been 20 years since La Tablée des Chefs began carrying out its social mission to fight against food insecurity and to develop food autonomy for young people. In solidarity with our partners, we have prepared and distributed over 13 million meals across Canada and over 45,000 youth have developed culinary skills through our various programs!

EVENT CO-CHAIRS



Jana Sobey
Senior Vice President,
Fresh Merchandising,
Sobeys



Gary Wade
President,
Unilever Canada

Your support to La Tablée des Chefs will allow us to continue our work towards food security in Ontario and across Canada.

REVIVE

RC SHOW 2022



RC Show
Restaurants Canada
THE HOSPITALITY EVENT OF THE YEAR

After a long hiatus, the 77th edition of the RC Show successfully brought Canada's largest economic sector together again in Toronto to reunite, reignite and facilitate the revival of Canada's foodservice and hospitality industry.

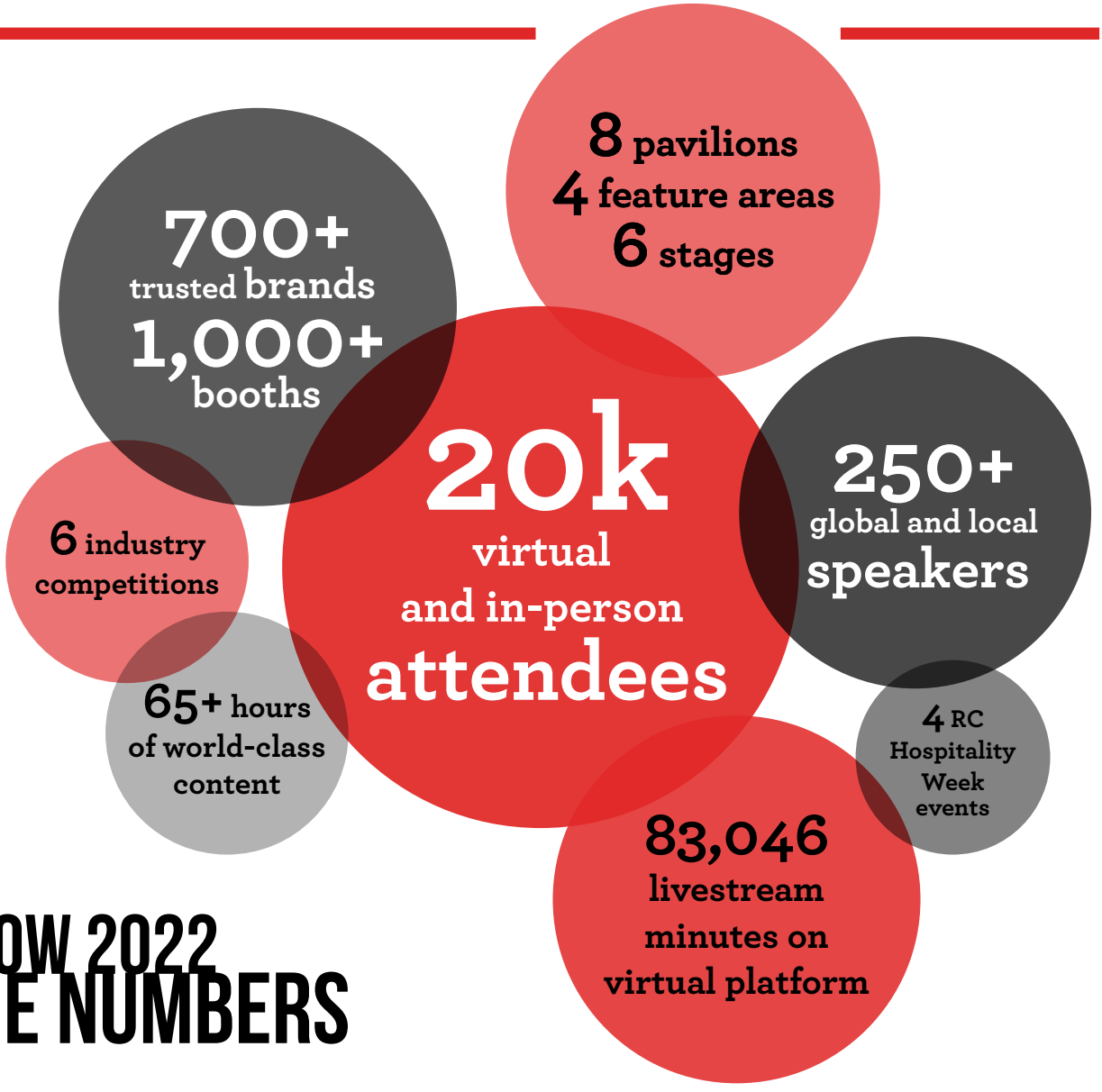
The ideas and innovations shared on the Show floor, in speaker sessions and at the many events, were designed to help revive and inspire the Canadian foodservice and hospitality industry throughout the coming year.

From May 9-11th, Restaurants Canada hosted a successful live and virtual hybrid edition of the RC Show, providing quality engagement opportunities over three action-packed days at Toronto's Enercare Centre to support and help incubate our industry's REVIVAL. The RC Show virtual platform livestreamed stage and event programming to a domestic and global audience while offering opportunities to connect buyers with exhibiting suppliers through the newly launched digital 365 Marketplace.

This comeback event brought 20,000+ hospitality professionals together, both in person and virtually, and was the first edition of the show to livestream the dynamism of the show floor to attendees from coast to coast on a digital platform. Local and global experts shared insights, inspiration, revenue-generating ideas and new technologies as well as their professional perspectives on the topics that matter most to the industry, from sustainability and waste reduction to diversity and inclusion and mental health.

The Show was also a reunion that moved many, including Restaurants Canada President and CEO, Roy Little. "It was incredibly emotional for both myself and the Restaurants Canada team to connect with many of you; hearing stories of strength, resiliency and sheer passion as you look to revive and grow your businesses. Just another reminder of why we, the RC team, love our industry so much! The road to the RC Show was a long one; from shifting dates to accommodate closures, to ensuring we could effectively provide both in-person and virtual experiences that were tailored to the comfort levels of attendees, but it was amazing to see it all come together."

RC SHOW 2022 BY THE NUMBERS



DAY ONE



MONDAY, MAY 9

Opening day kicked off with a buzzing and bustling exhibit hall filled with speakers, leaders, attendees and vendors. The drama and excitement of the Sommelier and Barista competitions was perfectly balanced by a joyful industry reunion at the Opening Night Reception, attended by 1,200 people.















Want more photos?
Visit **www.rcshow.com** to view and download the complete RC Show 2022 photo gallery.

Topped with Slices of Summer!



LACTALIS FOODSERVICE

Find us online for mouthwatering inspiration!

Let's connect

WWW.LACTALISFOODSERVICE.CA
@LACTALISCANADAFOODSERVICE

DAY TWO



TUESDAY, MAY 10

Day two was about building an itinerary that covered all the bases, from speaker stages and the exhibit hall to the Garland Culinary Competition, Beyond the Rail cocktail competition and day two of the Barista competition. After hours, attendees headed out into the city for the sold out Industry Night Out at Bar Mordecai and the Top-to-Top VIP event at Coffee Oysters Champagne.















Want more photos?
Visit **www.rcshow.com** to view and download the complete RC Show 2022 photo gallery.

DAY THREE



WEDNESDAY, MAY 11

The energy carried through to the last day of RC Show with the highly anticipated, sold out return of Breakfast With Champions and the Restaurants Canada Awards of Excellence. The popular Oyster Shucking and Cup Tasters competitions drew big crowds as industry attendees and suppliers met to exchange contacts and grab last-minute giveaways before heading home to put inspiration to work in their businesses.















Want more photos?
Visit **www.rcshow.com** to view and download the complete RC Show 2022 photo gallery.

AWARDS *of* EXCELLENCE

Canada's restaurant and foodservice industry is powered by passionate, innovative and creative people, from business owners and chefs to frontline staff and suppliers, and the many others who team up to serve more than 22 million customers every day.



RC LEADERSHIP AWARD

JOHN SINOPOLI, CHEF & OWNER, ASCARI HOSPITALITY GROUP

Chef John Sinopoli's innovations during the pandemic, as well as his engagement activities and initiatives in support of our industry throughout these unprecedented times has been a source of inspiration to so many. John has been a champion and extraordinary supporter of the supplier community with steadfast commitment of restaurants and foodservice operators across the country.



RC CULINARY EXCELLENCE AWARD

DONNA DOOHER, EXECUTIVE CHEF & OWNER, MILDRED'S TEMPLE KITCHEN

Chef Donna Dooher's bold, creative brunch innovations during the pandemic, as well as her dedication to telling a wonderful story through her culinary creations in pursuit of the best customer experience offer many lessons in culinary excellence for everyone in the industry.



RC SOCIAL ADVOCATE AWARD

TREVOR LUI, CHEF, CO-FOUNDER, QUELL NOW INC., & PRINCIPAL, HIGHBELL GROUP

Chef Trevor Lui's long-standing commitment to redefining and creating a more equitable and inclusive foodservice ecosystem through the launch of Quell Now Inc., have helped advanced our thinking and created meaningful new opportunities for Canadian foodservice and culinary talent.

TRENDI®

RC INNOVATION AWARD

TRENDI

Recognized for creating a game changing Canadian product for the foodservice industry, Trendi uses robotics to help the farm and food industry rescue and upcycle food waste into valuable products.

COULDN'T MAKE IT THIS YEAR? NO WORRIES!

365 MARKETPLACE

Visit 365 Marketplace powered by Restaurants Canada to catch up on all the recorded action and insights from industry leaders and experts, top tier suppliers and exhibitors, and big ideas to help drive your business forward.

rc365marketplace.com



MADE IN CANADA

Garland Canada, a Welbilt Company, is the leading supplier of foodservice equipment in the Canadian market. Garland Canada is committed to delivering high quality, reliable, innovative solutions that address operator needs. A high focus is placed on delivering operational and energy efficiencies, labour savings, menu execution and service and support solutions. Garland Canada and the portfolio of Welbilt brands deliver unmatched value and peace of mind.

WELBILT PROUDLY MANUFACTURES THE FOLLOWING BRANDS IN CANADA:



GARLAND®

Inspired by Chefs, Engineered by Experts

*Including US Range & Sunfire



CLEVELAND

Timeless Quality, Tested for Life



LINCOLN

Consistency you can Count on.

VISIT US AT WWW.GARLANDCANADA.CA

GARLAND® CANADA
A Welbilt Company

WELBILT® @WelbiltCanada @WelbiltCanada WelbiltCanada

CLEVELAND CONVOTHERM DELFIELD FRYMASTER GARLAND MERCO MERRYCHEF



Why do Foodservice & Hospitality Competitions Matter?

HOW INDUSTRY COMPETITIONS INSPIRE AND BUILD FUTURE LEADERS IN FOOD AND DRINK

BY CHRIS SZEGO

WHY DO FOODSERVICE COMPETITIONS MATTER?

The foodservice industry is no stranger to rankings. Even if the metrics are informal, most operators rate and classify many different aspects of their businesses. Restaurants know which of their dishes and drinks are most popular and most have preferred vendors for specific products, because those are 'the best.' Online reviews, though problematic in some respects, offer guests the chance to rate their experience and to share their opinions on ambience, service, food and drinks.

But not all restaurants are fully aware of the potential and importance of culinary competitions, and the impact they can have on employees and guests alike. The foodservice industry is full of competition at all levels, with rewards ranging from bragging rights to significant cash and travel rewards.

RC Show 22 featured coffee, sommelier, cocktail, and culinary competitions. MENU Magazine had a chance to talk to competitors, judges, volunteers and audience members to find out what makes culinary competitions exciting, appealing and persevere.







IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT WINNING; IT'S ABOUT LEARNING

SCA Canada, the Canadian chapter of the Specialty Coffee Association, runs six Canada-wide competitions as part of their mandate to raise awareness of the depth and breadth of special coffee. At the **Canadian Cup Tasters** qualifying competition, competitors tasted sets of "triangles": three cups of coffee, two of which were the same. The goal is to identify the unique cup as quickly and accurately as possible. The finalists for this competition will be flown to Milan, Italy to participate in the finals.

"I compete for the education," said Lynsey Hayes, a competitor from Sorellina Coffee in Edmonton. "This kind of competition forces you to learn, to develop your skills. It gives you the chance to taste so much coffee, to have so many sensory experiences. Besides which, it's fun!" Another coffee professional agreed. "I'm here because I want to learn. It's like a game, and I want to play."

The Q1/Eastern finals of the **National Barista Championship Qualifier** was also held at RC Show 22, attracting baristas from coffee shops and restaurants from all over the region. It's a rigorous competition: each participant prepares three espressos, three milk drinks and three signature beverages – all in 15 minutes. Emily Wong from White Heron Coffee was not a competitor this year but volunteered as a judge in several subcategories. "It's my way to participate in the larger community as a whole, to give back."

"People compete for many reasons," said Venice, another volunteer. She has previously competed in SCA's Latte Art competition and plans to again in the near future. "For me personally, I compete to improve my own skills, and to share with and learn from my colleagues in the industry. Coffee changes all the time. There's always something new to learn."

RC Show 22 was also the stage for the **Sommelier Service Competitio**n, an exacting practical skills contest in which certified sommeliers present a formal champagne service to a table full of guests – really, judges – who pepper the sommeliers with questions designed to test their knowledge, skills, and sang froid. At stake were thousands of dollars, with an all-expenses paid trip to the Piper-Heidsieck and Charles Heidsieck champagne houses in Champagne, France for the winner.

"Wine is an inherently competitive business," says Astrid Young, Wine Director at Merrill House in Prince Edward County, Ontario, noting there are several certifying bodies and some rivalries between schools. But she thinks service competitions instill a desire to learn. "Competitions like these are a way to constantly hone your skills, to keep up with knowledge and change. What matters most is the ability to make a connection, to establish trust. Every wine has a story, and if you can tell that story well, people will be interested."

SATISFIED EMPLOYEES STAY

When the global pandemic began, the Canadian foodservice industry was facing a major labour shortage. After years of lockdowns, closures, reduced hours and uncertainty, the labour gap is larger and more fraught than ever. Operators industry wide are searching for the best strategies to attract and keep employees. While most agree that wages and benefits are of primary importance, most innovators also agree that today's employees require more than just money to be satisfied.

"Today's employees need more than compensation," says Jordan Ekers, COO of Nudge, a top-rated frontline employee app.

> ***Competing is out of my wheelhouse, which means it's a growth opportunity. You only get better with practice."***
>
> - Chef Samantha Medeiros, Chef de Cusine, Casa La Palma and winner of the 2022 Garland Culinary Competition

"Not to downplay that – money's not negligible – but employees are looking for more than just wages from their efforts. People want meaningful work, to develop a sense of connection and community with their colleagues. They also want recognition, and the celebration of their achievements and milestones." Culinary competitions offer the chance for connection, community and celebration all in one package. Chef John Higgins, Director of Hospitality and Culinary Enterprises, and Culinary Ambassador, George Brown College, witnessed that connection and celebration while judging this year's **Garland Canada Culinary Competition**. He applauded the participating chefs' collegial attitudes. "You were competing against one another but also rooting for each other. Being able to support and congratulate each other like that is marvellous." Chef Higgins also sincerely thanked Garland for continuing to sponsor culinary competition throughout the pandemic. "When many people walked away after the last two years, Garland has kept – and even increased – their support for culinary competition and excellence."

The theme of this year's Garland Canada Culinary Competition was sustainability. Entrants sent videos of themselves cooking in their own kitchen with specific ingredients. The four finalists met at RC Show 22, where they had to create four plates in one hour, using all the black box items they were given, while keeping sustainability in mind.

The competing chefs all agreed that sustainability meant changing the way people think about food, both individually and as a society. They spoke about the importance of choosing local food and suppliers, of reducing food use and waste, and ensuring the work of foodservice is itself sustainable. All four finalists turned the notion of sustainability back to people and building a team that can grow together to weather tough times.

This year's **Beyond the Rail** *cocktail competition* built teamwork right into their contest parameters, to recognize and foster a sense of creative collaboration. Participants competed in pairs, working together to create an "Ideal Celebratory Drink" and a "Show Piece," using assigned alcohols, two ingredients brought from their home bar and two mystery items sourced from the show floor.







The competition was enjoyably boisterous, with competitors entertaining the audience, judges and one another, all while showcasing their considerable skills for $5,000 in prizes. The new format encouraged partnership between team members and between competitors and show floor suppliers. And, in the end, even between competing teams. The judges noted that when one team had a member fall ill, a contestant from a rival team stepped in to ensure their colleague would be able to compete, demonstrating the sense of community and creative collaboration that defines the industry spirit and made the past two years a little more bearable.

ADD TO YOUR SUCCESS STORY

There's another, more personally profitable reason for operators to support and encourage







their staff to enter competitions - the victory potential for competitors and the restaurants they represent – a valuable opportunity for publicity and promotion.

First, there's the "wow factor". For instance, with $10,000 in cash and prizes up for grabs, Garland Canada's Culinary Competition is a serious stage for up-and-coming chefs to highlight their talents. Chef Zach Keeshi, owner of Nagaan, looked at the competition not as combat, but as a showcase. "I want to put Aboriginal cuisine on the map. Competitions allow me to demonstrate it, along with my own talents."

Sponsoring staff in competitions can bring value back to the operator, paying multiple dividends. To begin with, professional education and development are key to staff engagement, and staff engagement is critical to retaining good employees. Competitions also provide a chance for owners, managers and the whole team to celebrate individual accomplishments. Everyone likes to be part of a winning team. And everyone loves a success story, including guests. It's just good business to let customers know about the struggles and triumphs of any competing staff members. Regular guests have the chance to offer encouragement and support, and new visitors know they're in the hands of a restaurant that strives for constant improvement.

Driving education and development, contributing to creative exploration and collaborative teamwork, and fostering worthwhile attention from staff and guests alike, foodservice competitions bring the win to everyone.

Winners

GARLAND CANADA CULINARY COMPETITION

1st and Fan Favourite: Samantha Medeiros, Chef de Cuisine, La Palma & Casa La Palma

2nd: Michael Roszell, Chef de Cuisine, Quaaout Lodge & Spa

3rd: Zach Keeshig, Chef & Owner, Naagan

Runner-Up: Ruby Gatt, Sous Chef, Caffe Un Po Di Piu

BEYOND THE RAIL COCKTAIL COMPETITION

1st: Monique Godinho & Sally Gillespie

2nd: Nick Incretolli & Madison Homewood

3rd: Katie Shewen & Erin Simpson

SOMMELIER SERVICE COMPETITION

1st: Jose Luis Fernandez, Langdon Hall

2nd: Matt Landry, Stable House Bistro

3rd: Christophe Reitz, Quatrefoil Restaurant

JOHN BIL OYSTER SHUCKING COMPETITION

1st: John Dejong, Penny's Motel & Après

2nd and "Cleanest Plate": Chris Manocchio, Rodney's Oyster House

3rd: Kelly Peck, Kickstand Communications

CANADIAN CUP TASTERS COMPETITION

1st: Paprik Liu, Phil & Sebastian Coffee

2nd: Giuliano De Vito, Subtext Coffee

3rd: Felix Cha, De Mello Coffee



CHEF GILLES HERZOG

CHEF SAMUEL SIROIS

LÉANDRE LEGAULT-VIGNEAU

When it comes to prestigious and rigorous culinary competitions, one name stands above the rest:

BY CHRIS SZEGO

Created in 1987 by Paul Bocuse and Albert Romain, the Bocuse d'Or brings together the best chefs from around the world to display their mastery of culinary skills and artistry. Like the Olympics or World Cup, it is not a single competition but a series of competitions culminating in a biennial matchup of the top 24 countries across the globe.

More than 60 competitions go into choosing the national representatives. Each country's team consists of one lead chef and one commis. The national winners go on to compete in one of four continental qualifying events: Europe, Americas, Asia-Pacific and



Africa. These four exacting, two-day contests determine the 24 chefs who will compete in the Bocuse d'Or final at the SIRHA trade show in Lyon, France.

The final competition takes place over two days and each chef has five hours and 35 minutes to create and plate two themed dishes to present to 24 judges, one from each competing country. Gold, silver and bronze medals are awarded, along with prizes for best commis, social commitment and more. And now, after two years of restrictions and isolation, the Bocuse d'Or continental qualifying events are set to start again. The Bocuse d'Or Americas competition took place in Santiago, Chile, July 14-15, 2022 and Team Canada is ready to compete.

Canada has been sending chefs to the Bocuse d'Or from the very beginning: Jamie Kennedy competed in the first event in 1987. This year's competing candidate is Chef Samuel Sirois, a professor at l'Institut de Tourisme et d'Hôtellerie du Québec (ITHQ), who originally won the national selection in 2019. Léandre Legault-Vigneau was selected by Chef Sirois from a panel of talented candidates to be his commis.

But the Bocuse d'Or is not a solo effort. Chef Sirois has been training under the experienced eyes of team President Chef Alvin Leung, the only Canadian Chef to earn six Michelin stars, and team coach Gilles Herzog, who came to Canada after training in several of France's most distinguished restaurants.

Chef Sirois has been preparing for two years. "It's like training for the Olympics," he says. "This is my chance to represent my country on the world stage. I'm proud to continue the legacy that many chefs before me have built and I'm looking forward to giving our industry the bragging rights we deserve abroad."

Dedicated to inspiring culinary excellence, Chefs Canada promotes Canadian cuisine, producers and ingredients both at home and abroad. The organization supports and funds national culinary athletes at major competitions like Bocuse d'Or, the World Pastry Cup and the Pâté Croûte World Championship. "Bocuse d'Or is like no other competition in the world," says Thomas Delannoy, president of Chefs Canada. "Thanks to our Board of Directors and our Bocuse Ambassad'Ors – composed of some of the most talented chefs in the country – we feel strongly that we will make the podium again in Chile. This golden ticket will give the team a chance to demonstrate the best Canada has to offer, not only in talent but with a myriad of Canadian flavours and products in Lyon in 2023."

For the Bocuse d'Or America finals, Chef Sirois and his team will create one meat platter and one fish plate (of 12 portions) for a panel of highly trained international judges – of which Chef Leung will be one. Chefs will be judged on composition, creativity, innovation, presentation, service practicality and of course, taste. A kitchen jury will also award points for hygiene, methodology, organization, preparation and technique.

As challenging as it is renowned, the Bocuse d'Or competition provides chefs a chance to exhibit their craft and skills on the world stage, while also emphasizing the depth and breadth of talent the global foodservice industry has to offer. Demanding and prestigious and truly international, the Bocuse d'Or is the pre-eminent culinary competition in the world.

> ***"I'm proud to continue the legacy that many chefs before me have built and I'm looking forward to giving our industry the bragging rights we deserve abroad."***
>
> - Chef Samuel Sirois



STAR POWER: MICHELIN GUIDE COMES TO CANADA

Michelin inspectors are visiting restaurants across Toronto in preparation for this fall's inaugural MICHELIN Guide Toronto.

Announced in May at the Four Seasons' Café Boulud and at RC Show 2022 as the first Canadian destination for the selection, the news is an acknowledgement of Toronto's world-class dining experiences and an opportunity for local chefs to join the more than 15,000 restaurants across the globe with Michelin Star ratings. "For the first time in its history, the MICHELIN Guide lands in Canada, and our inspectors are excited to experience the impressive culinary landscape of Toronto," said Gwendal Poullennec, international director of the MICHELIN Guides. "This first selection for Canada's largest city, and our first in the country, will represent the local flavours, international inspiration, and distinct creativity that makes Toronto's dining scene world-class."

A Michelin Star is awarded for outstanding cooking and considers the quality of ingredients, the harmony of flavours, the mastery of techniques, the personality of the chef as expressed in their cuisine as well as consistency over time and across the menu. A restaurant can be awarded between one to three Stars, with only 134 restaurants with a three Michelin Star rating. As part of the process of finding new Star restaurants, those with a Michelin Star are reassessed to maintain their Star rating in the next Guide. Restaurants can ask also Michelin to be considered for inclusion in the MICHELIN Guide.

Michelin also bestows Bib Gourmand ratings, which recognize restaurants that offer great quality food at good prices and are included in each city's MICHELIN guide. As well, they award the Michelin Green Star to restaurants involved in sustainable gastronomy.

Inspectors are full-time employees of Michelin and are experts in food, dining and hotel sectors with many years working the hospitality industry. They remain anonymous during the dining process by making reservations and paying for their meals to ensure they are treated the same as any other customer. The decision to award a Michelin star is a team process, with multiple inspectors visiting the restaurant to ensure consistency.

Toronto was being considered as a destination for the MICHELIN Guide before the COVID-19 pandemic. "Toronto's culinary scene is as diverse as the city itself, and the MICHELIN Guide Toronto is the perfect way to celebrate our culinary community," said Scott Beck, President & CEO of Destination Toronto. "It will be a powerful way to share our culinary capabilities with new audiences from around the world. We're so proud to partner with Michelin and our destination partners Destination Ontario and Destination Canada, to bring the MICHELIN Guide to Canada for the first time."

THE FUTURE OF HOSPITALITY STEPS UP TO THE PLATE

THANK YOU TO OUR RC SHOW 22 VOLUNTEERS



If you were one of the over 20,000 hospitality professionals who attended this year's RC Show, you likely met one of the 120 hospitality student volunteers who were involved with Canada's leading hospitality event. These students gain a unique hands-on learning opportunity by being exposed to every facet of the industry. By volunteering their time in operations as greeters, runners, and general support, the volunteers covered 300 different shifts over eight Show pavilions working with exhibitors, assisting with the stages and competitions and working with the event management team, the students get valuable hands-on live event experience. Additionally, volunteers receive a letter of recognition, access to the RC Show floor, make connections with fellow students and industry professionals and are eligible for future internship consideration with Restaurants Canada.

Hospitality students can volunteer at next year's RC Show, which will be held from April 9-12, 2023, at Enercare Centre in Toronto. Wondering what it's like to volunteer at RC Show? This year's top volunteers share their experiences, what they learned and how they're making a difference in the industry.

Thank you to all of the volunteers at RC Show 22!

Rebecca Beaulieu
Durham College, Hotel Operation Management
Graduating Year: 2023

I look forward to working with and serving many different kinds of people. Hospitality to me is more than just ensuring everyone is catered to, it's about getting to know people and how they click. I always enjoyed working within the hospitality industry, whether it's personal interests I enjoy or helping make the community better.

The RC Show allowed me to see a lot of new tech, food trends and watch some great competitions! I particularly enjoyed watching the sommelier competition.

Thedyfred Michael Billones
Centennial College, Hotel Operation Management
Graduating Year: 2023

Customer service has always been my cup of tea. Being a part of the guest's experience and making it remarkable is the best thing I can offer by going above and beyond what is needed.

I'm looking forward to the wide range of opportunities this industry has to offer, I have always been an active student leader including joining volunteer opportunities whenever possible. What I like about volunteering, aside from meeting and helping out people, is the experience, exposure and the lessons I have learned.

One of the best parts of being a volunteer during the RC Show was meeting the entire volunteer team. We all gathered from different cities and schools; the team was really on top of everything and worked well together.

During our student networking event this phrase struck me the most; "Attitude is Latitude." which is true! Attitude matters, may it be in your life or in your workplace. Your attitude will bring you places and always take action to what you love doing – your passion.

Melanie Cameron
Centennial College, Baking and Pastry Arts
Graduating Year: 2023

Having worked within the hospitality (foodservice) industry for several years now, the greatest thing I look forward to is making people happy. The expectations, desires and needs of individuals are ever changing and we are in a world and industry that must adapt to these changes on a continuous basis. There is great pride in exceeding clienteles' expectations with special dishes or offerings; all whilst being mindful of our roles, the impressions we make and the footprint we leave behind.

It was a transformational experience to be able to volunteer at the RC Show and be a part of such a wonderful opportunity. I believe that volunteering provides an opportunity to develop, enhance and learn new skills while giving back to the community, the industry and beyond. The event truly demonstrated the versatility, pride and passion within the industry and the determination to persevere, continually transform and elevate the industry. The RC Show revitalized my passion for the industry and ignited the drive, within myself, for the future of my career and aspirations.

Paul Yuen Wai Chow
Centennial College, Event Management
Graduating Year: 2022

Being in the hospitality industry, I am looking forward to working with incredible industry professionals to establish creative and innovative events, including working with people from all different countries and industries.

I volunteer because I like to develop new skills and build on existing experience and knowledge by attempting different roles. During the RC Show I gained a new perspective on the use of technology and how it is essential for the revival of businesses after the pandemic.

During our student networking event I was surprised by the diversity of the hospitality industry. The industry professionals on the panel have considerable expertise with special skills. Working in hospitality should be formless like water; I should be able to adapt to certain situations, grow, and change. It is vital for the new entry of the industry.

Alex Chun Sing Leung
Centennial College, Baking and Pastry Arts
Graduating Year: 2022

With the restart of the economy, the hospitality industry has also repositioned its prospects and development after the cold winter. In anticipation of the imminent reopening of borders, I expect the hospitality industry to be hiring heavily. In addition to basic training, it is necessary to raise awareness of hygiene protection and prevention to meet quarantine challenges with a chance to come back.

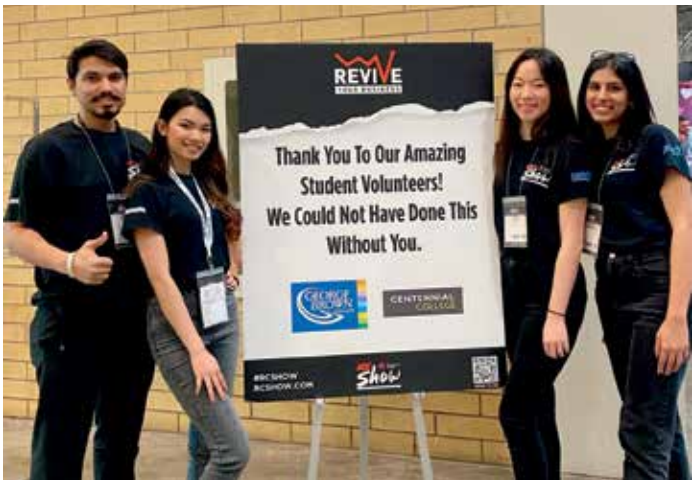
Since going through two years of lockdown and having just graduated, I am very eager to step into the community and reach out to the masses. Volunteering has given me the first step in returning to a normal life.

What I appreciate most about the volunteer work of the entire RC Show is that a group of people from all over the city, with different ages, genders, backgrounds and ideals come together to complete the assigned positions and make the entire exhibition a success. Every day is full of different, unexpected requests. Under the leadership of our Team Lead, all our volunteers acted in multiple roles and worked together to solve all problems.

Amber May
Conestoga College, Tourism
Graduating Year: 2022

The one thing I'm most looking forward to by being in the hospitality industry, is that everyone truly loves what they do!

I believe volunteering is one of the best ways to give back to your community. Being able to volunteer for the RC Show was an amazing experience, and I loved being part of the official kick off to the revival of the industry!



Camila Pellini de Oliveira
Centennial College, Hotel Operations Management
Graduating Year: 2023

I love the hospitality industry because I enjoy the feeling of being busy, and making things happen.

Volunteering for the RC Show provided all different kinds of experiences in the hospitality field, and it helped me understand what fits me best. My favourite part was getting to know all the people who are already in the industry, and who are studying for it as well. It has been hard to get in touch with new people, even from college, because of the pandemic.

During our student networking event, hearing all of the experiences and advice that the team has shared with us was so valuable. They all had completely different stories, and they are working in different areas, although it is still hospitality. It is good to have examples.

Manrose Sekhon
Centennial College, Food Media (Graduate Diploma)
Graduating Year: 2022

I look forward to being a part of a new age of hospitality and technology. With all of the new advancements that technology has been making, this new era will showcase food worldwide through different platforms. Media is becoming one of the largest aspects of the culinary scene.

I believe volunteering allows for networking and the opportunity to give back to your own and other communities. My favourite part about volunteering at the RC Show was seeing the passion within each exhibitor, speaker and chef that presented themselves at the convention.

Our student networking event allowed me to meet people in my industry who have been through what I am about to trek through, which helps you a lot in realizing what you have to look forward to and what to watch out for. The event allowed for networking with expert-level people you wouldn't normally have the chance to speak with. For me, getting to see Donna Dooher and being able to express how thankful I am for the steps she has taken to allow room for women like me to be in the culinary field.

Geraldine Tamayo-Artillaga
Conestoga College, Culinary Arts
Graduating Year: 2023

As a culinary student who has a lifelong passion for food, I look forward to being given the chance to be part of the global hospitality community as the industry is immensely competitive. Being able to create delicious dishes everyday and experimenting on flavours, while seeing the delight on customer's faces, is the ultimate goal.

I enjoy volunteering because it's all about diversity and opportunity. This industry requires you to work in a multicultural environment exposing you to job opportunities you didn't know about, develops your professional and social skills, and advances your career by improving job prospects. During the RC Show, I learned how each position is important in the entire wheel of the event and how each and everyone can contribute to the success of it. The key factor is to be able to communicate and work with different people from different backgrounds as "One Big Team".

Hospitality is one of the most noble professions as everyone employed in this industry contributes to caring for their guests. Individuals with the right attitude and passion are best suited for this "job description" that is all about kindness and creating lifelong memories for them.

Gabriela Vintimilla
George Brown College, Event Management
Graduating Year: 2022

By being in the hospitality industry, my goal is to serve my clients better and provide them with a memorable and enjoyable experience using my expertise and talents. I wish to learn from the best in this wonderful and big industry because this is what I am passionate about.

I believe volunteering provides a valuable opportunity to serve others, to meet new people and to learn from different points of view how a great project like the RC Show works. The opportunity to assist a large number of people in a short period of time is a rewarding and challenging experience. In addition, you can observe and learn from other people to determine what the most effective methods are to deal with a particular circumstance and test your reaction and response skills when faced with unexpected situations. The best thing is to watch a project come to life within minutes!

During our student networking event I learned that if you love what you do, just get involved! Do your research and ask people how to participate, and then just follow up and learn!



Juice That's Worth the Squeeze

Industry events have returned, and they're more important than ever. Are you getting what you need to succeed?

We had hoped for a return to 'normal'; however, mounting food costs, labour challenges and supply chain frustrations continue to dog this indomitable industry we all know and love. In spite of it all–and against increasingly tough odds –new restaurants continue to open and many tenured venues continue to bring back patrons. As we look to the road ahead, it's clear that coming together, learning and collaborating is only more important than it was during the pandemic. We need to innovate as the challenges are not yet behind us. Whether you attend industry shows, conferences and symposiums virtually or in person over the coming year, getting out there to renew and forge new connections and welcome new ideas will be important to every foodservice and hospitality professional. The value of these exchanges and events can be optimized by your approach.







How to get the most out of industry events:

Before you go...

Choose wisely.
Before registering for an event, make sure your needs and style of operation are reflected in the schedule and speaker roster. While any presentation or session could spark an insight or new idea that fits your business, if you are facing specific challenges, relevance and a focused theme will provide greater tactical value.

Plan ahead.
Doing a little research and creating a customized program and schedule before attending can help you focus your purpose and improve your results. Keynote presentations are ideal for big ideas and influential content, but smaller working sessions or highly-focused presentations can provide tactical and immediately actionable strategies and insights. If you are attending with colleagues, fan out to cover more ground and make plans to debrief and share intel once you return to your workplace.

Make contact.
Join and monitor event social pages to find other companies or professionals who plan to attend. Don't be shy. Industry events are as much about networking and one-on-one connections as they are about content. Reach out and set up in-event meetings with people you would like to connect with and/or learn from, and be open to any requests that may come your way from other attendees. Be sure not to overlook opportunities to reconnect with customers as well as current or past colleagues and professional contacts.

While you're there...

Show up early and bring your gear.
The early bird avoids long lineups and gets the advantage of knowing the lay of the land in advance. Be sure to bring your computer and phone chargers, business cards and any promotional info pieces you may need. While most conferences have digital contact scanning in place, personalized materials can help you stand out, position yourself or your business and aid contact recall.

Put yourself out there.
Conferences and events are one of the rare opportunities where direct outreach and connection are not only welcomed and encouraged, but expected by most attendees. Don't wait for the "perfect chance", find an opening, introduce yourself and be clear about the nature of your interest in connecting. Be sure to exchange contact information and, if you

promise to follow up, be sure to do so.

Follow and engage with event social media pages.

Especially for large events like RC Show, you can miss a lot if you're not staying socially connected. To expose yourself to new contacts and opportunities, take part in the event discussion on social media and lend your voice and perspective. Monitor social media to follow the discussion, learn about any limited-time opportunities like giveaways or free tickets to paid in-event sessions and find out about last-minute schedule changes.

Stay organized and do your homework.

Bring a folio or notebook to collect and record information, post-event resources and downloads and new contacts. Events are busy and frenetic, so be sure your notes are clear and detailed enough to ensure you can remember the source and context. Most importantly, review your notes and follow-up materials at your earliest opportunity and note any "to-dos" in your schedule so the opportunities don't melt into your busy life upon your return.



365 MARKETPLACE



The success of this year's hybrid live/virtual RC Show is proof that the foodservice industry is hungry to connect, learn and be inspired. As we continue on our path toward Revival, RC Show 2022 content is available for members on the newly-launched 365 Marketplace, powered by Restaurants Canada, for those who couldn't make it and for those who want to revisit the ideas that inspired them.

Access RC Show 2022 content on 365 Marketplace, the first metaverse marketplace for the foodservice industry, powered by Restaurants Canada:

rc265marketplace.com

SINCE 1978

CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF® BRAND

HOW DOES YOUR MENU STACK UP?

A dynamic menu balances inspired beef dishes with return customers to boost the bottom line. Find equilibrium.



Bring fresh ideas and exciting solutions to the table with the help of our culinary and butchery experts.

Transform your menu and be recognized for the best beef.

If it's not CERTIFIED,
it's not the best.

Scan here for menu ideas and beef cut alternatives.

CertifiedAngusBeef.com/chefs

Marketing at the speed of culture:

Digital trends, data and social media for the industry

BY SHANNON MURPHY



"Data is King." It's an expression we are hearing more and more but what exactly does it mean? More importantly, what does it mean for your business? How can you capture, scrutinize and use data to successfully promote and market your restaurant or food service business, especially post COVID?

This topic resonated deeply with restaurant owners at this year's Restaurants Canada Show. Presented by Tik Tok Canada, "Marketing Your Business for Success" was one of the top attended Speakers Stage sessions. Moderated by Jo-Ann McArthur, President, Nourish Food Marketing, Canada's only full-service marketing agency specializing in the food sector, attendees has the opportunity to listen to industry experts - Chris Barrett, CEO of Operatic, a creative digital agency and once a restaurant owner himself and Vanessa (V) Gaik, Head of Brand Partnerships & Sales, Tik Tok Canada - about emerging digital trends and data optimization opportunities every restaurant owner should be considering right now as the world settles into the "new normal."

While the restaurant industry prepares for what's next, it's evident everyone is thinking about future proofing more than ever. Chris Barrett identified four key digital trends and enhancements that all restaurant owners should be focusing on:

1. **Own your online ordering experiences**
2. **Understanding your customers and offer multiple payment options**
3. **Automation - especially in the face of labour shortages**
4. **Diversifying revenue streams**

"Right now almost 50 per cent of our clients have taken the step to ensure their customers are ordering directly from their restaurant versus a third party app and we expect that trend to continue," says Barrett. Owning your online ordering experience allows you to own the end-to-end customer engagement, to get to know your customer better and to create centralized data repositories. "This allows a restaurant owner to control their brand experience as opposed to putting it in the hands of someone else," he continues. He also advises leveraging QR codes for contactless ordering. "We expect about 95 per cent of customers already use them - it's not very often technology is free. It saves money for the restaurant, improves the customer experience and reduces errors, and can even assist with payment."

Which brings us to the second trend - non-traditional payment options. Payment is personal so make sure you have different payment options for your customers based on their needs and preferences. Make use of digital wallets or virtual wallets such as Google Pay or Apple Pay.

Automation or having a strong restaurant management system will be another key digital trend for restaurants in a post pandemic world. Restaurants now have food orders coming from multiple sources - take out, delivery, in-house orders - add in labour shortages and quite quickly things can get messy. "If you're not aggregating all those inputs into a seamless way for the kitchen to function or if you're not thinking about communications from the front of house to the back of house, there's a lot of opportunity for things to go wrong," says Barrett.

The final trend is to focus on developing a diversified revenue stream. "During the pandemic, about 45 per cent of people got used











to buying something outside of traditional food and drink," says Barrett. "Customers are really looking to support restaurants whether through buying a special sauce only your restaurant makes, offering a mixology course or selling cocktail kits." He continues, "You need to pay attention in terms of what else you can do to diversify revenue streams as it's something customers are there to support you with."

All of these trends have one thing in common - a reliance on technology and digital interactions to augment the digital or in-person experience. The key is to figure out how to heighten the customer experience throughout the entire journey - before the customer goes to the restaurant, while at the restaurant and even post dining - how can you use digital tools to enhance the overall experience?

That's where a social media platform like TikTok can make a big difference. With over 70 billion views of food-related content, TikTok is an emerging social media platform which allows restaurants to engage with customers in an authentic and community driven way. "The most interesting thing about TikTok is the sense of community," says Vanessa (V) Gaik, Head of Brand Partnerships and Sale. "There's a lot of people eager to come to the platform to collaborate and learn and we have lots of different communities that can really help bolster your business." Best known for its trend setting capabilities, TikTok is essentially marketing happening at the speed of culture. "You need to figure out a way to adapt your business to the trends," advises Gaik. "There is no wrong way to show up on the platform as long as you're being true to your brand. The best part is that there is no failure, it's all about learning on the platform."

So how can restaurant owners leverage TikTok? "I think the most important thing as a new business owner on the platform is to spend some time on the platform, get to know the creators who are speaking to your community, identify food trends and understand how your business wants to show up on the platform." Gaik strongly recommends opening a business account on TikTok to unlock a suite of tools to empower your business. "These tools will help you show up on TikTok just like the larger brands - so whether that's licensed music, creative tools and video effects or collaborations with creators, there are a ton of tools available to you and they are free."

A current key food trend on TikTok also identified by both Nourish Food Marketing's 2022 Trend Report is sustainability and conscious consumption, especially for the younger generation. "TikTok invites people in and pulls back that hospitality curtain a little bit," says Jo-Ann McArthur. Gaik completely agrees: "Content about sustainability is something that TikTok audiences really lean into," she says. "They love to see behind the scenes project work, perhaps it's a charity event that your business is supporting, the local food market you source your produce from. That transparency really helps to build the relationship with the audience."

Barrett extends the concept of sustainability beyond food content, focusing on search engine optimization - specifically making sure

> "Right now, almost 50 per cent of our clients have taken the step to ensure their customers are ordering directly from their restaurant versus a third-party app."

you have an up to date Google Business Profile. Previously known as Google My Business, it can be a massive first engagement for people who are searching for a new experience. "People are searching in a non-branded fashion," says Barrett. "About 55 to 60 per cent of people's online interactions are with a Google Business Profile. It's the first handshake to introduce someone to your brand and it's something you can take action on right away." He does advise businesses to ensure verifying the data on the profile and encourages the use of photos and 360° tours. Your Google Business Profile should be managed like you would any other social media platform - ensuring constant updating of content and management of Google reviews - the good and the bad.

The good and the bad is something that also resonates with TikTok users and the content they engage with. "TikTok is not that polished and that's why it's successful," says Gaik. "The most engaging content shows the behind the scenes work, specifically the hard work that restaurant owners deal with every day. There's a big story to tell from over the last two years within the restaurant industry and I think a lot of people would listen."

David Wen, owner of Parle by Viet Fresh has just recently started a TikTok account and has even gone so far as to hire a TikTok manager. He also relies heavily on feedback from his staff on what content his customers would like to see. "My staff are the ones that talk with customers every day, they know what customers like and they know what they don't like. Involving your staff in promoting the brand is one of the most important things you can do."

Understanding your customers is also one of the most important things you can do to support your business. "What we've started to see is the collapse of the marketing funnel," says Gaik. "It's becoming this never-ending loop of not only having that holistic journey but also being top of mind. Over 40 per cent of customers are downloading loyalty apps so we know that something is changing with the Canadian consumer." It is vital to use the customer data you have and action it in a way that appeals to all your customers - both the customers you know and the customers you don't know you have - creating that holistic journey where people can live and breathe the brand.

Barrett agrees. "Build your strategy on the premise that everything needs to be properly integrated and uphold an authentic end to end brand experience. The biggest challenge for restaurant owners," says Barrett, "is that often they will piecemeal tactics together all at once instead of picking a few and doing it right." For example, leverage data from your ordering and payments platforms to understand your customer's food preferences and tie that data back into a customer loyalty program. "Maybe you have a loyalty program that allows certain customers to order something on the menu that other people can't order - if you can tie it into a circular loop it's going to help you be more successful."

> "Customers are really looking to support restaurants whether through buying a special sauce only your restaurant makes, offering a mixology course or selling cocktail kits."



Leveraging the power of data insights to promote your restaurant takes many shapes and forms and can be overwhelming. "People have this idea of having big picture data in order to make accurate decisions but that's not the case," says Barrett. Data can be a lived experience, data can be desk research, data can be a focus group, data can be a TikTok posting and engagement with your online community. "One of the biggest hurdles for people is that they will hesitate in terms of waiting for things to get back to normal," says Barrett. "And I think that we just need to embrace that this is the new normal and not be afraid to dig in and get started."



How to Leverage Digital Marketing to Attract New Diners and Boost Your Brand

How can you drive business growth using social media? This RC Show panel showed us the way with experts from TikTok, Google and Meta.

presented by RC Show sponsor SkipTheDishes

The RC Show kicked off with a bang, leading with an incredibly informative panel discussion presented by show sponsor and Canada's number one most-trusted food delivery brand*, SkipTheDishes. Moderated by Skip's own Kavita Joshi (Director of Digital) and Laura Amantea (Director of Brand), we heard from Peter Hand (Brand Strategy Lead for Google in North America), Christina Kavalauskas (Creative Strategy Director for Creative Lab at TikTok), and Mukul Goyal (Client Partner with Meta) as they spoke about the different platforms and what they can do to help revive your business. So, what is each platform about? Which one's best for your restaurant? How often should you post? Do you need to spend a lot of marketing money? We got all your questions answered and then some. Read on for the highlights:



Though many consider it another social media platform, TikTok is an entertainment platform that lets users create, watch and share 15-second to 10-minute videos shot on mobile. Three key elements of the business are: community (creators), discovery (suited to your interests), and culture (trends). "Brands are encouraged to play within the space as long as they do so in a way that's authentic to the communities they represent," says Christina.

Some interesting stats:

- TikTok's audience spends a movie's worth of time on the app daily.
- 71% of TikTok's audience feels a closer connection to people on TikTok vs. other platforms through shared interests.
- 70% of TikTok's audience believes they can change culture.
- 73% of TikTok's audience feel a deeper connection to brands on TikTok than others because they show up in a unique and authentic way.

What does this mean for the restaurant industry? Users often refer to food-related content as "Foodtok" – and they have 3.1 billion views as a destination community within the TikTok platform. This has opened the door to all kinds of brands doing all kinds of different things, like these popular restaurants:

1. **McDonald's:** Leveraged existing brand assets to drive awareness to their iconic food items, like cinnamon rolls and fries;
2. **KFC:** Worked with unique creators to drive demand for their new chicken sandwich, playing with the idea that "anyone can be the Colonel";
3. **Cheesecake Factory:** Leaned into a trend they saw on the platform, and turned an unofficial menu hack into an official menu item, the Louisiana Chicken Caesar Salad.

Three pieces of advice to market your restaurant:

1. **Get on TikTok.**
2. **Get cooking:** Experimentation is key to this platform. There's no magic recipe for what's going to land. You have to experiment, because something that works for you may not work for someone else.
3. **Partner with a sous chef:** Creators are an asset here. They want to partner with brands and they're really good at what they do. If you see a creator who's already talking about your brand, reach out to them. Chances are they'll want to partner.



With all the shifts that have happened over the past couple of years, it seems that advertisers are returning to YouTube more than ever. As the pioneer of free video sharing (and watching), YouTube is where popular meets the person for an incredibly individualized experience and flexible formats (from 6 seconds to 6 minutes to 6 hours). "No matter what your unique passions and interests are, you'll be able to find that community and that content on YouTube, whenever you want," says Peter.

Some interesting stats:

- YouTube is the #1 video content provider.
- 63% of viewers say they bought from a brand as a result of what they saw on YouTube.
- More than a quarter of the time spent on YouTube is adults 18-and-over watching content together (communal aspect).
- YouTube shorts are making it easier than ever to create and enjoy short-form content — up to 30B daily views.

Three YouTube trends from the past year:

1. Explosion of streaming services (consumers watching what they want, when they want).
2. The continued rise of short-form content.
3. There was a digital celebration in which people chose to execute all sorts of different videos online, from DIYs to recipe creations to music lessons.

A piece of advice to market your restaurant:

At the end of the day, it's easy for things to get complex. "If you bring YouTube your challenges and your focused business goal, whether it's to drive growth or build your brand, the platform can help make it as simple as possible to hit your mark. Even use your existing assets to plug and play into whatever your objective needs to be," says Peter.

Meta

This is a company that builds technologies that help people connect, find communities of like-minded people, and grow business. Though the parent name Meta is fairly new, you will likely recognize their top platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, and WhatsApp.

Some interesting stats:

- Meta has 2.91 billion monthly active users around the world.
- 77% of internet users are active on at least one Meta platform.
- 60% of Instagram users go on the platform to find new products or places.
- People spend an average of 33 minutes a day on Facebook.

A piece of advice to market your restaurant:

"As we're adapting to new behaviours and changes, there are a lot of things these platforms can help with, like communication moments and influences," says Mukul. But as a restaurant, how can you drive sales using these platforms? With Meta, there are three ways:

1. **Direct food delivery ads:** This is the simplest way. You don't have to worry about logistics regarding payment. Your ad simply shows up on Instagram or Facebook, a consumer clicks on it, and they can order food through the service.
2. **Messenger storefront:** This one is a more sophisticated option that uses a chat bot through Messenger and WhatsApp. It's a super useful tool for businesses that want to communicate with their customers in real time. For example, customers can use the chat bot to ask their favourite restaurant a question about a menu item before they order it.
3. **Already have an app/website/landing page?** If you have a store you want to drive traffic to, there are plenty of flexible solutions on each platform that can provide the tools you need to help drive traffic to your website or in-restaurant.

TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE TALK:

If there's one thing we learned here, it was that there is definitely no shortage of opportunities to be had on digital channels. Here are the net takeaways from the discussion.

1. **Bring the authentic brand of your restaurant to the platform.**
2. **Creative content that really resonates with your local community is super important.**
3. **Everyone is spending tons of time on these platforms, so you need to be where your customers are.**
4. **There are a ton of organic opportunities that everyone can be a part of (and you don't need to spend a load of marketing dollars).**
5. **Experiment on all platforms to see what works best for you – they're constantly changing.**

FINAL BURNING QUESTION:

If money and time are finite, which platform should you focus on?

It should come as no surprise that the answer is different for different brands. Understanding your demographic is important to determine which platform to partner with. All platforms are going to do different things to reach consumers in different ways. The important thing is to think about how your messaging is going to land. Follow your consumer.



**Voted by Reader's Digest 2021.*

SKIP THE DISHES

We hope you got some great tips on how to use these platforms to your advantage. SkipTheDishes is always looking for ways to help Partners grow, and that includes marketing support. Want to learn more about how Skip can help with your digital marketing efforts? Contact us for more info.

wholesale club™
everything foodservice

Shop where the chefs shop



Free Business Membership. No Minimum Order Required.

Why Shop at the Club?

- No Membership Fee.
- No Minimum Order.
- Restaurant Quality Products.
- Product sold by the each, Club Pack, case or pallet.
- Wholesale pricing and savings through our Multi-unit discounts on thousands of items.
- Fast check out and efficient store layout to minimize your time away from your business.
- Extended opening hours for your convenience.
- Commitment to food safety.
- Great value on our Sunspun brands, no name and many other private label products.
- Focus on your business and leave the shopping to us with PC Express.

wholesale club™ everything foodservice × express™

Save time, shop online.†

Place your Wholesale Club order online and pick up in-store.

†Applicable fees for in store pickup of online orders are extra. In-store pickup of online orders is only available at select locations and on orders over $75.

To find a location near you, visit wholesaleclub.ca

Follow us @therealcanadianwholesaleclub

Available only at your local

wholesale club™
everything foodservice



sunspun™

Priced to add value to your menu.

Sunspun dressings are made from high-quality ingredients but priced lower than national brand dressings. You can get all your customer favourite dressings like Ranch, Greek, Italian, French, Coleslaw, and of course, Caesar. Sunspun salad dressings, only available at Wholesale Club.



sunspun™ Caesar salad dressing
3.78 L



sunspun™ chicken breasts
4, 5 or 6 oz varieties, frozen, boneless, skinless, seasoned, uncooked, 17% meat protein, 5 oz= approx. 29 pieces, 4 kg



sunspun™ sliced bacon
frozen, rindless, sliced
5 kg



sunspun™ cracked black pepper
420 g



sunspun™ mayonnaise
20 L

visit wholesaleclub.ca for store locations, store hours, flyers and more.

Q&A with THE HONOURABLE RANDY BOISSONNAULT

THE HONOURABLE RANDY BOISSONNAULT IS THE **MINISTER OF TOURISM AND ASSOCIATE MINISTER OF FINANCE**. MINISTER BOISSONNAULT WAS FIRST ELECTED TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS IN 2015 AND WAS RE-ELECTED IN 2021, REPRESENTING EDMONTON CENTRE.





MM You joined us at the 2022 RC Show, which had the theme of 'REVIVAL' as we look beyond the pandemic. Tell us what the revival of Canada's foodservice industry means for tourism.

Food and Beverage services are one of the five industries that make up the tourism sector in Canada, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced back-to-back record years. This is no surprise as the Canada brand is strong and we have a large market to the south of us.

From the beginning of the pandemic, the Government of Canada regularly connected with small business owners, including restaurateurs and others in the food services industry, as well as with industry leaders and associations like Restaurants Canada to better understand and respond to their needs.

As a result, the Government of Canada provided $23 billion to help many tourism businesses and establishments weather the impact of public health measures and border closures due to the pandemic.

The government is investing $30 million to improve the Foreign Workers Program and make it more accessible, efficient and agile to support the food and beverage industry as it works to bring in the good people needed to rebuild.

In addition, the government is poised to kickstart tourism in Canada and support the resurgence of the food and beverage industry with a new Federal Tourism Growth Strategy. We have begun a series of consultations with stakeholders, provincial and regional partners as well as industry leaders, including from culinary tourism, and we will use this Strategy as our roadmap to achieve long-term success for Canada's tourism sector.

Culinary tourism – where food is the destination – helps us connect to what is being grown and produced locally while celebrating the hard-working farmers, producers, distillers, chefs and restaurants that make it possible. And when it comes to culinary destinations, Canada has it all: from the plentiful seafood from our Atlantic and Pacific coastal regions, to the wineries of Ontario and artisanal cheese-makers in Quebec, to farmers' markets in every province. Let's not forget the rich Indigenous history experienced through the food, music and song of pow wows.

> "The government is investing $30 million to improve the Foreign Workers Program and make it more accessible, efficient and agile to support the food and beverage industry as it works to bring in the good people needed to rebuild.



Our restaurant sector received an important boost with Michelin's decision to expand its famed food guide Toronto in recognition of Canada's largest city as an international culinary destination. I hope this is only the beginning of acknowledging some of Canada's most acclaimed eateries at the global level. When international visitors return in full force to Canada, I am convinced that they will discover our restaurants and culinary experiences as something that is uniquely Canadian, evoking the diversity of cultures and flavours that the will find only in our country.

I know these are the kinds of mindful, meaningful and sustainable experiences that today's travelers, both from Canada and abroad, are seeking.

> "Culinary tourism – where food is the destination – helps us connect to what is being grown and produced locally while celebrating the hard-working farmers, producers, distillers, chefs and restaurants that make it possible."

MM Can you tell us about some meaningful ways that restaurants give back to the local community?

The restaurant industry is a key source of employment in the Canadian economy. According to Statistics Canada the accommodation and food services industry provided over one million jobs in 2021. As well, restaurants support local agriculture, fisheries and food processing operations. When we shop or dine at a local business or restaurant we support our country's economic development. Restaurants are also an important gathering place where we meet friends and family, build relationships and create memories. Patrons share photos of their dishes on social media and are inspiring us to try to replicate them at home.

Restaurants are the lifeblood of regional food culture and when you choose to dine at a restaurant, you invest in your community and preserve local agriculture.



MM What are some of the hardest challenges that restaurants have struggled with due to the pandemic?

Disruptions and unpredictability have taken a steep toll on the tourism sector – including the restaurant industry. Health restrictions required the closing of restaurants and they had to lay off too many of their staff members. And when restaurants could reopen they had to reconfigure their environment to ensure the safety of their patrons, they had to develop and apply health protocols for their staff and clients.

This being said, I must acknowledge the tenacity, hard work and passion of restauranteurs. They got creative, leveraged the digital economy, catered meals, and reinvented the take-out dinner. I salute them for their resilience and innovative spirit.



> Restaurants are the lifeblood of regional food culture and when you choose to dine at a restaurant, you invest in your community and preserve local agriculture.



With restrictions lifting, it's time to look ahead. There is hope on the horizon. I am extremely happy that now restaurants can open their doors wide and again welcome patrons in Canada's fine dining establishments.

Thinking about the revival of foodservice, what restaurant were you most excited to get back to when indoor dining opened back up?

There are a lot of extraordinary restaurants and diverse cuisines in Edmonton, but one restaurant that I was really excited to go back to was Bianco. As they say: "good food starts with good ingredients, and good ingredients are best handled by passionate people", and I'll never get tired of their delicious rustic Italian cuisine.

What kind of moments are you most looking forward to being able to enjoy again at this restaurant?

It doesn't have to be a special occasion to enjoy great food in a great atmosphere. Whether it is a night out with friends, family, or just dinner after work with my partner, these are the moments we have all been missing over the past two years and its so nice to be back.

As Minister of Tourism, Minister Boissonnault's top priority is to ensure that Canada remains a tourist destination of choice, supported by Destination Canada and working in partnership with the tourism and hospitality sectors. You can follow Minister Boissonnault on @R_Boissonnault

ICONS of EUROPEAN TASTE

gather joyfully *eat* soulfully

live deliciously.

When you choose **Prosciutto di San Daniele PDO**, **Grana Padano PDO cheese** and **Prosciutto di Parma PDO** you show a passion for life that includes incomparably delicious, natural food that's never mass-produced or processed. Each of these products carries the Protected Designation of Origin seal, the European Union's guarantee of quality and authenticity, so you know they are from a specific geographical region in Italy and are created using traditional techniques that have set the standard of culinary excellence for generations.

Learn more about these icons of European taste at iconsofeuropeantaste.eu









CAMPAIGN FINANCED WITH AID FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION.

THE EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORTS CAMPAIGNS THAT PROMOTE HIGH QUALITY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS.

ENJOY IT'S FROM EUROPE

Reinventing Classic Cuisine with a European Twist

The rise of fusion cuisine has quickly become a top trend as chefs look to combine unexpended flavours and concepts to create new and memorable meals. When it comes to reinventing the classics, European staples like meat and cheese have long been an industry secret to elevating everyday dishes.

Known for their high-quality ingredients and authentic, heritage products, European cuisine can bring a global zest to your fare and surprise and delight your guests with a fresh fusion of flavours.

Summer is the perfect time to experiment with unexpected pairings and elevated classics. Check out these mouth-watering recipes for inspiration



Pesto Pizza with Prosciutto di San Daniele & Grana Padano

There is likely no other item as classic as the pizza. A menu staple for restaurants of all flavours, the common pizza gets a major upgrade in this reimagined version featuring a flatbread base, pesto sauce and the sweet and salty flavours of Prosciutto di San Daniele. Top with Grana Padano cheese for an unexpected twist on a standard staple.



The Ultimate Summer Salad with Prosciutto di Parma & Grana Padano

Updating salads for summer is a great way to reinvent a classic. Adding seasonal ingredients, fresh fruits, nuts, cheese, and meat takes traditional to impressive when it comes to greens. To take your salad to new heights, try topping with white balsamic vinaigrette for a punch of acidity, crumbled Grana Padano cheese for a hint of creaminess and sweetness, and sliced Prosciutto di Parma for the perfect hint of salt to balance out the flavours.

Recipe courtesy of Icons of European Taste Canadian Brand Ambassador, Chef Chuck Hughes.

For complete recipe instructions and additional ideas, visit iconsofeuropeantaste.eu

The content of this promotion campaign represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission and the European Research Executive Agency (REA) do not accept any responsibility for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Giving Foodservice Workers What They Want...

BY CHRIS SZEGO



...and Deserve

The foodservice industry is currently facing an overwhelming staffing shortage. That's not exactly shocking to hear – even those not directly involved are likely aware the foodservice industry was one of the sectors hit hardest by COVID-19. In fact, the May 2021 Labour Force Survey issued by Statistics Canada noted almost two-thirds of job losses since February 2020 happened in foodservice. That's two thirds of all job losses, across the entire country.



An Ongoing Problem

What might not be as well known is that even prior to the pandemic, the labour gap in foodservice was already approaching crisis proportions, with more than 130,000 foodservice positions unfilled coast to coast. "In 2018-19, we could see the writing was already on the wall," says Chris Elliott, Senior Economist with Restaurants Canada. Demographics played a part. Almost 40 per cent of all foodservice positions used to be taken by young workers, those aged 15-24: the industry was known to be Canada's number one supplier of first jobs. But Elliott points out the youngest age cohort is currently a much smaller percentage of the population than it used to be, down from 20 per cent in the 1980s to 12 per cent today. And many of that 12 per cent are not seeking employment but concentrating on education instead.

There was a staffing crisis looming and the pandemic catapulted the threat into a catastrophe. First came all the foodservice closures which, though necessary, were devastating. Elliott says the first months of the pandemic saw two-thirds of foodservice workers out of work. Considering the foodservice industry accounts for almost 1.2 million jobs, that's a staggering percentage.

As restaurants began to reopen, however haltingly and with repeated surges, setbacks and readjustments, the staff shortage persisted. Immigration, or the lack of it, also played a part. After March 2020, with travel in and out of the country at a standstill, immigration hit an all-time low. "Immigration has always been a source of filling jobs," says Elliott, and indeed, according to Government of Canada figures, more than a quarter of foodservice workers are immigrants. When workers cannot enter the country, those jobs go unfilled.

Young people are less likely to seek foodservice jobs than in previous generations. In addition, many potential foodservice employees simply could not immigrate to accept work. But beyond demographics, there's another aspect of the enduring staff shortage that the industry is finally beginning to face: namely, how difficult, demanding and improperly compensated foodservice jobs can be.

It's not that the industry was entirely unaware. In recent years, efforts have been made to improve working conditions for staff. For several years prior to 2020, the RC Show programming was full of suggestions for improving work-life balance, for monitoring and treating substance abuse and for including employees' health and wellbeing in the pursuit of sustainability. But during the pandemic, the uncertainty became untenable for many employees. When COVID-19 kept restaurants shut for weeks or even months at a time, and constantly changing restrictions meant no one could properly plan ahead even in the short-term, many employees left the industry altogether, choosing instead to seek out other types of work.

If the sector can truly address that uncertainty and do away with the instability and insecurity foodservice workers face, the labour gap will shrink.

How Do We Get There?

At RC Show 22, many smart, original thinkers openly addressed the all-important question: what do foodservice workers want? The answers were descriptive rather than prescriptive, and some of them were surprising.

One clear-cut answer that was not surprising was: better remuneration. At the time of writing, the minimum wage in Canada ranges from $11.40 (Quebec employees receiving tips) to $16 (Nunavut). Even at the higher end, that's less than $35,000 per year and in some urban centres, that full-time wage barely covers housing. Ensuring all foodservice workers are paid liveable salaries is an obvious first step.



But it is only the first step. Remuneration is about more than just wages. This is where formalized incentives and benefits, long absent from foodservice compensation conversation, come into play.

The temporary and shift-based nature of many foodservice jobs has meant that employees have historically received very few benefits: if nothing else, the pandemic has taught us that paid sick leave is a fundamental necessity. Other benefits might include additional health insurance, vacation days or even retirement savings plans. Toronto restaurant Marben has enacted a number of excellent changes for their employees, including paid sick days, a health spending account and an employee assistance plan (EAP). Marben's General Manager Karen Davidson highly recommends implementing an EAP: "They can be shockingly inexpensive for the variety and amount of service they provide." She adds that Marben also moved away from the tipping model to a higher hourly wage, in order to provide employees with a predictable and reliable income.

Benefits are an ongoing part of compensation. Incentives, designed to stimulate performance, are often temporary and can be structured for fun or formality. Presenting occasional rewards – whether gifts, cash or even bragging rights – for top sales or service in a given time period is a solid way to show appreciation for top performers. Suresh Parmachand, Chief Marketing Officer at Trend Hunter, thinks now is a great time to experiment with different models. "After periods of significant global chaos, there comes a time of recharging and opportunity. The first Roaring 20s saw a lot of invention – but innovation doesn't have to be limited to physical objects." He encourages operators to broaden their perspective, to look outside this industry for inspiration. For instance, he hopes to see restaurants introduce the concept of signing bonuses. "Why not? They shouldn't just be for athletes and tech gurus." He also recommends establishing titles for job positions. "The thing about titles is that they imply upward movement. They lead somewhere. Employees can see they have a goal to aim for."

More Than Money

But compensation, while significant, is not the only thing foodservice workers are looking for. While the 'Great Resignation' theory peddled by certain corporate interests was partly intended to shame workers back to in-person work, it had the ripple effect of making people aware that many other employees were experiencing the same epiphany. Just because employment used to work in a certain manner didn't mean it had to continue that way.

More and more, people want to know their work itself matters; that it will do more than merely provide the necessities of life. Work-life balance is important, especially among the younger Millennial and Gen Z cohorts. But even further, employees want to know their work has a purpose. People want their employment to be meaningful.

And it can be. Foodservice is, after all, a service business, and those who make it their career are often drawn by the chance to make a difference in others' lives. "Hospitality is driven by people," says Jordan Ekers, COO of Nudge, "And people want to know they're contributing to something that matters." His recommendation? "Look for staff who align with your values."

That may seem like a tall order, but it doesn't have to be. "When faced with difficult decisions, our values give us direction," says Kristina Sammut, CEO of Frontier Leadership. "When challenged to step into leadership roles, our values provide a solid foundation." While an explicit mission and values statement can help, a small shop's values don't have to be that strictly codified. Sammut proposes a value exercise: have the staff brainstorm ten values they feel speak to the heart of the business, then whittle the list down to three. When performed by a whole team, the values become bedrock.

And involving the whole team is another important act. According to research in the Deskless Report: Foodservice edition put out by Nudge, a sense of teamwork is highly desirable. "Foodservice workers want to find a sense of community among their co-workers," says Ekers. They work strange shifts that may put them at odds with other friends, so they want to create true camaraderie at work. That means making space for staff to



> **Hospitality is driven by people, and people want to know they're contributing to something that matters. Look for staff who align with your values."**
>
> - Jordan Ekers, COO, Nudge



interact socially, both at work and outside it." It doesn't have to be expensive or time consuming. "Maybe schedule a movie meet up every quarter, or a picnic in warmer months."

Another aspect of community that is often overlooked is recognition and celebration. Justin Holmes, Chief Revenue Officer at 7shifts, says it's one of the intangible benefits foodservice workers want most. "Employees want recognition from their managers. And they should get it. It doesn't have to be hard." Recognition can, and should, take many forms. Acknowledging and complimenting even small moments of excellence, like handling a tricky situation calmly for instance, or performing a routine task swiftly and accurately, can go a long way to making employees feel seen. Larger, more public affirmations do the double duty of also adding to the sense of community. Consider a regular, non-competitive award or a wall of honour, or some other permanent example of appreciation. "Don't forget to mention employees when it comes to publicity and promotion. Better yet, let them speak for themselves when it comes to internal newsletters or external interviews."

Ongoing training is an additional avenue for both recognition and development. "You want to help your employees think of foodservice as a career, not just a job," says Jennifer Ménard-Shand, Founder and CEO of Staff Shop. "That means innovation, development, and training." She believes operators should offer and invest in ongoing training, not only because technologies and procedures change, but also to keep employees invested.

Another way to acknowledge skill and encourage further development is to sponsor interested staff members in culinary contests. The foodservice industry has a multitude of competitions from fun and festive to seriously prestigious. Participants encounter new techniques and skills and get a glimpse into the wider community as a whole. Chef Ruby Gatt, sous chef of Caffe Un Po de Piu in Montreal, was a finalist in this year's Garland Canada Culinary competition. "I entered the competition to get out of my comfort zone, to meet new people, and try new things." She highly recommends the experience and hopes to compete again soon.

Long-Term Sustainability

Sustainability is an important motif in foodservice today. Operators, suppliers and vendors all work hard to reduce waste, save energy and minimize the environmental impact of their operations. But the ability to support a process over time applies to employees as well. Operators need to meet the needs of the business without neglecting the needs of the staff.

An urgent priority to attend to is workers' mental health and wellbeing. Long hours, and physically demanding work coupled with uncertain schedules and income means the sector sees more than its fair share of mental health issues. Recent years have finally seen a rise in understanding and acceptance of mental health issues at work, but the industry has a long way to go.

"Mental health has been neglected in the industry for a long time," says Hassel Aviles, Founder and Executive Director of Not 9 to 5. The organization conducted a survey of hospitality workers in 2019 and found 90 per cent of respondents reported having experienced mental health or substance abuse issues due to work. And that was before the pandemic created an unprecedented mental health crisis around the world. Not 9 to 5 offers advocacy and resources to help hospitality professionals at all levels attend to mental health, both their own and that of their staff. The Hospitality Healing Project in Calgary also offers mental health education and resources, along with both free and subsidized services for foodservice workers. Co-founder Heeso Cho wanted to raise awareness, to let foodservice workers know they were not alone in their pain.

One of the major pain points for foodservice workers is the unpredictability of their hours.



> **“According to our research, erratic scheduling is the second reason, after low wages, that foodservice workers leave jobs, both in the over 25 cohort and the under 25s.”**
>
> - Justin Holmes, Chief Revenue Officer, 7shifts

It can be incredibly disruptive to have to constantly adjust their personal schedules when work suddenly arises or disappears. Jim Taylor, Founder and CEO of BenchmarkSixty, advocates for a radical change to scheduling strategy. “Usually, the metric for efficiency is labour cost as a percentage of revenue. That needs to change. It’s the biggest source of anxiety, stress and turnover for operators and staff. It’s time to shift the perspective away from dollars and percentages to people.” The way to do that is with research. Spend some time sifting through collected sales data. “How do you figure out many staff do you need on a Monday? Examine the last 30 Mondays, average out the covers, and assign staff for that number.” It’s a strategy that removes over-staffing, under-staffing and frantic last-minute changes. “There’s no guesswork, and no sending staff home to cut costs.”

Holmes strongly agrees with Taylor’s assessment of scheduling stress. “According to our research, erratic scheduling is the second reason, after low wages, that f oodservice workers leave jobs, both in the over-25 cohort and the under-25s.” ==The under-25s often require more flexibility in their schedules, usually for school-related reasons. The over-25s need both to be able to count on their hours and to set and keep other plans. “People don’t really leave jobs, they leave managers. So schedule with empathy. And keep your staff in the loop with modern communication tools. Let’s face it – everyone has a phone. Use an app that will keep every-one in the know when it comes to schedules.”

Putting it Together

So what do foodservice workers want? There isn’t one simple answer. Higher wages, yes, but frankly that’s true across most industries. And money as a motivator lasts only a few months. Tangible benefits, like paid sick leave, EAPs, or additional health insurance are very attractive perks. But intangible benefits like recognition and community building are also highly sought after. And addressing traditional stressors, such as erratic schedules and mental health issues, goes a long way to assure employees they are acknowledged and valued.

Value, purpose and a sustainable lifestyle: these are goals operators should have in mind for their workers. The specific methods and techniques operators adopt to get there will vary from restaurant to restaurant, and that’s okay. Your methods are part of your story, something to share with staff and customers alike. Because in the end, foodservice is a people industry, and workers are people too.

Exciting

possibilities for gluten-free crusts



Your pizzas. Your styles. Deliciously gluten-free.



Our **Gluten-Free Pizza Flour Blend** makes it simple to deliver the styles you want. Be inspired to create great-tasting thin crust, pan pizzas and flatbreads that appeal to consumers' dietary preferences and lifestyle choices with our certified gluten-free flour blend and enjoy a piece of the pie.

Learn more at ardentmills.ca/gluten-free-pizza

© 2022 Ardent Mills, ULC. All rights reserved.

Ardent Mills®

Nourishing what's next.

THE MARKETPLACE

INSPIRE · INNOVATE · EMPOWER



BUNN
Quality Since 1840

BUNN has embraced sophisticated new technology to meet the changing needs of customers while remaining committed to delivering the highest possible quality beverage in each cup for every occasion. The equipment portfolio includes a home brewer collection and a full line of dispensed beverage commercial solutions including coffee and iced tea brewers for multi-cup and single-cup use; superautomatic espresso machines; coffee bean grinding systems; dispensers for exceptional tasting cold or hot beverages such as juice, lemonade, hot chocolate, cappuccino and iced coffee; liquid coffee dispensers; gourmet ice systems; precise temperature water systems; water quality systems; paper filters and more.
www.bunn.com

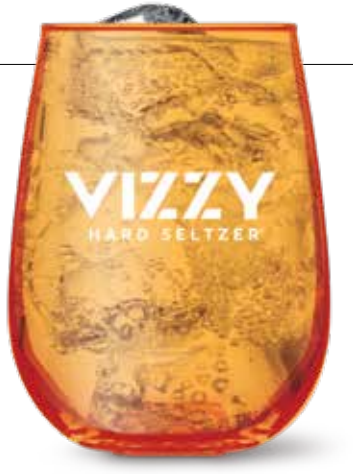
Sysco
At the heart of food & service

We're ready when you are.

Restaurants across Canada have been dealing with constant changes for the past year. As Canada's largest foodservice distributor, Sysco has been working tirelessly to ensure all our talented food experts are ready to help you prepare for whatever comes next. In addition to Canada's largest supply chain, broadest product assortment and best-in-class resources, we also offer flexible payment options with no delivery minimums. So you'll have the reliability, confidence and flexibility you need to adapt your business.

Contact Info: www.Sysco.ca/Ready
(855) 450-3069 | info@corp.sysco.ca





Vizzy Hard Seltzer

Vizzy Hard Seltzer is now available in draught! This refreshing 5% ABV beverage will remind you of a tropical paradise. A lively sparkling seltzer packed with notes of papaya, passion fruit and acerola cherry. It's light bodied and slightly sweet with a refreshingly crisp finish. Pair with Thia Cuisine, grilled pork chops or enjoy in a tall glass with ice before a meal.

Available in Quebec, Ontario, and Western Canada in July!
www.vizzyhardseltzer.ca
@vizzyhardseltzerca

365 MARKETPLACE



Powered by Restaurants Canada and created in partnership with Nextech AR Solutions, this new digital platform showcases our industry's best suppliers using state of the art technology bringing buyers and sellers together to do business. 365 Marketplace is THE new place to go for live events, training, product demos and Restaurants Canada webinars.
www.rc365marketplace.com



JUST Egg

Made entirely from plants, JUST Egg cooks, looks and tastes like chicken eggs. Developed with human and planetary health in mind, JUST Egg has approximately the same amount of protein as a conventional egg but with zero cholesterol and less saturated fat. JUST Egg ingredients use 98% less water, 86% less land and produce 93% fewer carbon dioxide emissions than conventional chicken eggs. JUST Egg comes in a liquid format, as well as a toaster-ready option in JUST Egg Folded.
www.ju.st

Beyond Meat

Beyond Chicken Tenders are a delicious, nutritious, plant-based option that does not sacrifice any of the taste and texture of traditional chicken tenders: a crispy, golden outside followed by a flavourful, juicy inside. In consumer testing, the product scored at parity in overall flavour to animal-based chicken tenders.[1] They are perfect as a standalone appetizer or entree, or as an addition to sandwiches, salads and tacos.

Beyond Chicken Tenders are made from simple, plant-based ingredients, contain 14g of protein per serving, have 40% less saturated fat than the leading foodservice chicken tender, contain no GMOs, antibiotics, or hormones, and have no cholesterol.
Available at Canadian foodservice distributors nationally.
www.beyondmeat.com

[1] *Based on US CLT results, May 2021, 95% CI, n=200*



Chipotle Mexican Grill:

Growing Fast Casual in Canada

BY CHRIS SZEGO

Tabassum Zalotrawala is the ***Chief Development Officer of Chipotle Mexican Grill***. Since joining the company in December 2018, Tabassum has driven the company's growth strategy and created their overarching plan for global development. Her early background in architecture gives her a decided advantage when it comes to directing the international real estate, construction, design and contracts administration functions of her portfolio. With an MBA from Emory University and advanced post-graduate certifications from Stanford and Harvard Business School, Zalotrawala is uniquely qualified to deliver results.

One of Zalotrawala's first major projects was overseeing the implementation of the "Chipotlane" pilot: a drive-through pickup lane where customers could quickly grab their digitally-placed orders. Chipotlane orders are prepared separately from in-restaurant orders, reducing friction for both guests and employees. Less a traditional drive-thru than a marriage of mobile ordering and advanced pick-up techniques, use of the Chipotlane was popular from the get-go. Fast Company called it one of "The Most Innovative Architecture Projects of 2020".

The timeliness of the pilot was confirmed when the pandemic hit, and low/no touch encounters became necessary. Chipotlane use exploded, and the pilot graduated into the mainstream. Currently there are approximately 300 Chipotlanes. The first Canadian location opened in Port Coquitlam, B.C. in October 2021.

Menu Magazine had a chance to sit down with Zalotrawala, along with ***Anat Davidzon, Managing Director of Chipotle Mexican Grill, Canada***, after RC Show 2022, to talk about the culture at Chipotle, the brand's expansion into Canada, and the importance of professional development.



Tabassum Zalotrawala, Chief Development Officer



Anat Davidzon, Managing Director, Canada



From L to R: Jeff Dang, CEO, imPerfect Fresh Eats; Tabassum Zalotrawala, Chief Development Officer, Chipotle; Adenah Bayoh, Co-founder, Cornbread; Roberto Sarjoo, Sr. Director of Marketing, Smooth Commerce on the Fast Casual panel at RC Show 2022.

MM Here we are with the Chief Development Officer and Managing Director, Canada of Chipotle Mexican Grill, and you're both women. That seems significant, especially in such a big company.

TZ: *It's absolutely remarkable, but I think we have a ways to go. I'm happy to be part of a company that has good representation for women, from the executive leadership team, through the senior leadership team, all the way out into the field. I have about 110 people on my development team, and I can tell you that a good 45 per cent of them are women.*

These days though, diversity can't just be about colour or gender. I wish we could move beyond that idea – there's so much more to diversity than that. It would be nice to see different types of human beings, different types of life experience. Retaining diverse talent is one of our pillars, part of our purpose. Not just in our new restaurants, but in all our existing Chipotle restaurants, our support centres and our offices too. We've been very intentional with that. Sixty per cent of our promotions are internal. This year our goal is to increase that number.

AD: *In the last few years, everyone's been talking about diversity. At Chipotle, diversity is something we strive to improve. It feels like here in Canada, diversity is part of who we are and what defines us as a country.*

MM Chipotle has a strong expansion plan for Canada. Is that sense of diversity part of the appeal? Or was growth in Canada always part of a larger plan?

AD: *The first restaurant opened in Canada in 2008. From a sales perspective, it performed very well, even though the brand awareness isn't as high as in the U.S. But given the diversity of Canadians who are used to tasting different foods through travel and through their varied backgrounds, the type of food we sell will allow us to focus on Canada and really grow the brand.*

TZ: *And, don't be too humble Anat, the excellence of operations helps a lot. Anat and her team run a really tight ship, which makes growth that much easier.*

For a while after those first restaurants, we didn't have another plan in place. I joined the company in late 2018. At the time there was a mini pause on expansion, until a new leader was in place. We wanted the time to evaluate the landscape of the existing restaurants, to build a team here. But once we started, things began to happen quickly. Because you don't just start opening restaurants: it takes about 20-24 months to open a restaurant from inception to completion. So, when we started seeing signs of that turnaround happening, we said, "We've got to turn that faucet on, now."

MM If you came on in late 2018, 24 months takes us well into the pandemic...

AD: *At the end of 2019, that's when it all started.*

TZ: *Last year we opened how many restaurants in Canada? Three? All of which were managed and supervised remotely, because no one from the U.S. could travel here.*

MM Now that things are in motion again, what are the plans for this year? And next?

AD: *Originally, the decision was to develop in markets where we already existed, Ontario and B.C. – so that's where the focus has been for Tabassum and her team.*

TZ: *That's where we started. But given the performance we saw in our existing*

restaurants, our proven markets, we felt it was time to begin our foray into newer markets. So, we've released Edmonton and Calgary as well. We have sites approved there that will open in the next 18 months or so.

I think those will be good markets. Currently in Canada, the fast casual segment has, what, only three per cent market penetration? Hearing that made me really happy. This is a wide-open landscape for us to get into.

***AD:** When I entered the space 14 years ago with a previous brand, the segment was in its infancy. Fourteen years later I feel like it hasn't changed much. In Canada we have 38 million people, with a high percentage of them concentrated in cities. I think that's part of the barrier to entry, part of the challenge new brands and concepts face. But it's a wide space and I feel really comfortable with Chipotle being a part of it. And I think it'll bring up the entire industry in the future. Other new brands will see there's potential for growth.*

MM Tabassum, you've said that today's customers care a great deal about both the quality of the food and the quality of the culture of the restaurant. How does that attention impact your plans?

***TZ:** Chipotle has very clear environmental, social and governance goals. They characterize our food, our people, where we source. We require everything, whether it's produce, or the animals we use, to be responsibly raised. That is so important to us. We set goals which are tied to executive compensation.*

That drives the right behaviour and tone at the top, and ensures we make the right decisions around purchasing. In my case it's about building restaurants, so there are a lot of environmental goals to meet, to make sure that we're not making any compromises in any way. That in itself is a big deal. We have specific goals around that.

In terms of food, Chipotle also does an immense amount to support our farmers and our communities. We have an Illuminaries program, where we invite young entrepreneurs in the agricultural business to present us with their business cases. Chipotle offers selected winners a $10,000 scholarship towards their business venture, as well as mentorship from one of our executive team members.

We want to encourage young farmers. It's really clear: we talk about real food all the time, and we put our money where our mouth is. Chipotle has pledged $5M over five years to the National Young Farmers Coalition. Because we buy from small farmers, and if we don't offer sincere support, the concept of real food is going to disappear. We take that very seriously.

***AD:** There's been a decline in local farmers: the growth of new farms is 40 times less than it used to be. There's a real need to make a change, to enable our ability to buy from local farmers.*

MM Financial support is obviously important, but you also mentioned mentoring. You're involved with the GLEAM network [a volunteer-based non-profit providing mentoring and leadership development to underserved communities in the foodservice industry]: what are your thoughts on the importance of mentorship?

***TZ:** I've been very blessed to have good mentors myself. It's very good fortune to have someone that can guide you in your career. Not advise you all the time, but to be there to listen to you. Because often you can come up with your own answers. I take that very seriously - it's a part of paying it forward. GLEAM is a way I can support mentorship. I'm not on the board anymore, but I serve as a volunteer. And I've mentored a couple of foodservice professionals. It gives me great joy to see people grow.*

***AD:** I can tell you that every conversation with Tabassum is mentorship. Something she says always sticks. It's so embedded in her – I don't know if she even realizes it. It's innate.*

MM A big theme of RC Show 22 was 'What do foodservice workers want?' Besides the obvious, one of the first things that comes up is a sense of career, a sense of a trajectory. How does Chipotle approach that issue?

***AD:** Chipotle is a role model for that. In three and half years, a crew member who starts as an hourly wage earner can advance in their career all the way to what we call 'restaurateur' – it's the highest form of GM in a restaurant – and receive over $100K in salary, plus bonuses and benefits. Employees have a clear path to anything they desire if they have the skills and the qualifications.*



"People are social animals. We're always going to want to gather around good food. That's just what we do. I don't think restaurants are going anywhere."

- Tabassum Zalotrawala

TZ: *Workers want to be part of something they can be proud of. That's true at all levels. Not too long ago I was in Vermont, where I met a Field Leader – someone who manages about seven or eight restaurants. That young woman is probably not yet 30 years old. She's managing a multi-million dollar business, and as a field leader, will have about 200 people reporting to her. She started working part-time at Chipotle in college, and decided this was going to be her career. And guess what? It is.*

At dinner, I told her, "You know what? Next step is Team Director. And then Regional Vice-President." And you could see it; she could absolutely do something like that. It was really satisfying to see, and made me happy, to know that there's a clear path. I always say that it's not about hiring, it's about retention. And the way to retain good employees is by continuing to develop them. Give them something they can be excited about. A challenge, so they feel like they're growing.

I talk about that with my team all the time. My perspective is: we're not just opening 200 restaurants, we're creating tens of thousands of jobs. And we are putting really good food in the mouths of so many people in the community. That's the real job.

AD: *And that's what growth really means. We have all these KPIs, and of course we want to move up the needle, but at the end of the day we are making a difference.*

TZ: *In our own little way. But every little thing counts. That's one way of cultivating a better world: I'll give you another example. It's easy to get caught up in the financials. To say 'Let's cut costs, let's do this…' But I promise you when we do such exercises the filter includes: Do these actions meet our purpose? How is this cultivating a better world if we start using cheap plastic, or do something that doesn't align with our ethos? So we chuck those ideas and move on.*

MM Many people get into the foodservice because of passion. Here in Canada, foodservice has often been a first job, then workers develop a passion for it. Do you still feel that passion?

AD: *I stumbled into the food industry - it's not something I ever thought I'd do. But yes. I always had a passion to do the right thing. When we're talking about Chipotle, we're doing the right thing. The right thing by our people, the right thing by the food that we serve, by the environment, suppliers, farmers. That makes our job easy, honestly.*

TZ: *I started my career in very high-end hospitality. And I'm an architect by background. The food business also just kind of happened to me. When I moved to the U.S., a position in foodservice was the first opportunity I had. What I fell in love with was working with real people.*

At the time I was mainly focused on servicing franchisees, and it really resonated with me. Because they were small business owners, without the huge infrastructure corporations have. My job was to assist them in building their restaurants, to help make them look good. I fell in love with it. The idea that you get to influence a space so many people are going to get to use was huge for me. I still feel that today.

It's not just people, it's the whole growth aspect. In my line of work, not only do I get to grow people, but I get to grow a business. I think that's the best job in the company. I get to grow the brand, literally, physically. Your buildings are the best billboard for your brand. People get in touch with the buildings much before they ever eat there.

MM Especially these days, when people might not even go in them at all.

TZ: *They still do – you'd be surprised. That's been my take all along. No matter how much digital continues to rise, or at least sustain, in-restaurant dining isn't going anywhere. People are social animals. We're always going to want to gather around good food. That's just what we do. I don't think restaurants are going anywhere.*

AD: *That's not a prediction and it's not a hope: I think it's safe to say now that it's based on fact. We've seen tremendous growth in the digital space. But people are coming back to the restaurants even as digital sales sustain at a high level.*

TZ: *We just created new customers. Give people what they want, where they want, how they want it. That's the model. That's how you cultivate a better world.*



COLOURING OUTSIDE THE LINES:

MENU Q&A with Chef Meeru Dhalwala

Chef, Cookbook Author & Co-Owner of Vij's restaurant and My Bambiri organic baby food

Vancouver, British Columbia



MM What inspired you to be a part of the foodservice industry?

My entry into the restaurant industry was by accident and necessity. I have a Masters degree in Developmental Economics and I was working for an international non-profit organization on projects in Africa mostly. I met Vikram Vij and things moved quickly. I was in Washington D.C. and he was in Vancouver. He had just opened a 14-seat restaurant with all of his savings, so him moving to DC wasn't an option. We figured I could easily find a job in Vancouver, so we got married and I moved to Canada on Feb 5, 1995! I didn't have a work permit for the first three months and I hung out with Vikram at his work. I didn't realize how hard it would be for me NOT to work and we really needed extra income. We needed more customers. So, at the age of 30 I taught myself how to use a knife. As soon as I could chop garlic and onions, I knew that cooking and creating my version of my Indian cuisine is where I now belonged. Vikram shined with customers and service and my passion for the cooking side was immediate. Because it was brand new—14 seats and just us—it was easy to add me.

> *Actually—I wasn't given the chance, I grabbed it while it was dangling. I wasn't waiting.*

MM Being an entrepreneur has its challenges, are there challenges specific to being a female entrepreneur? How did you overcome them?

I'm not sure re: any type of entrepreneur, but yes there were many challenges of being an Indian and female chef/restaurant owner, especially in the 1990s, AND especially since I didn't go through the traditional European-style training. I'm a self-taught woman-of-colour chef. In Canada, I identify as an immigrant and a woman. Both give me a source of strength as much as they gave me initial difficulties, which just make you stronger by overcoming them. I don't use cookbooks and my techniques/combinations are my own. I couldn't share personal stories about onions being thrown at me by the chef I was training under as an apprentice. I didn't know how to work a line. I didn't know fine dining restaurant etiquette. And I didn't care to have onions thrown at me as a rite-of-chef-passage in the 90s.

I often felt as if other Vancouver chefs didn't take me seriously. I was ignored or treated as Vikram's outspoken/aggressive wife. It offended and hurt me at first, but then I have this wonderful channeling from my childhood that I do: I go inwards to myself. I focus on what I want and what's important to me. I refuse to let myself get distracted. I had a full kitchen to myself with staff I had hired, and I had time to experiment, learn, create. I created my own kitchen cooking environment I needed so that I could thrive as well as our restaurant. All women. Give women a chance the way I was given a chance and see how beautifully they welcome it and strive.

Actually—I wasn't ¬given the chance, I grabbed it while it was dangling. I wasn't waiting.

In hindsight, the male chefs of the 90s and early aughts just didn't know much about Indian cuisine and there were no immigrant, female self-taught chefs. When Vikram and I won Best Asian Restaurant from Vancouver magazine in April 1995, I knew we were on our way to shine with Vij's.

I grew up in the Washington D.C. area with Indian parents who spoke Hindi at home and cooked Indian food. But everything else about my life outside the home was American. We arrived in the U.S. in winter 1969. There were Black kids and White kids. No Brown kids at school. I was teeny tiny in comparison and the only ESL kid when there was no ESL. I was often asked to identify myself as either Black or White. I was never taken seriously. I learned to navigate my "being" while making friends and while being teased.

So, I entered the workforce with a deep self-confidence that often got shaken at the shallow level. And I recognized that shallow will always pass."

MM What do you see as the most exciting new opportunities in the industry? What are your predictions for the sector's future?

We restaurants can take climate change – in terms of agriculture, fisheries and animal husbandry – to a meaningful, skyrocketing level. The foods we eat, how they are grown/produced/fished/raised and food waste = 25% of all greenhouse gases. In addition to being entrepreneurs, chefs are creators and we can lead our customers. I don't enjoy just pleasing my customers, I see myself as an expert of food and food issues around me, just as GPs see themselves as experts on their patients' health issues. The more delicious and different foods I create, the stronger my pedestal to be a leader in climate change. It's not enough to earn money anymore.



Meeru Dhalwala in conversation at the Full Service Leadership panel at RC Show 2022.

> *I like partnerships of two. The financial, bookkeeping and customer service side isn't something I particularly enjoy. I love human resources. I love doing family or climate change-focused community cooking events, not TV competitions. I love being holed up with my kitchen staff. Vikram and I divide according to our strengths and trust the other to do their job."*

The pandemic created opportunities for collaborative ventures in new products/services that consumers are more open to trying. Has this created more space for female entrepreneurs? How can women take advantage of the opportunity?

Yes, for sure. Over the past two years people ate at home way, way more and found creative ways to eat at home—not just take-out from restaurants. People had to find ways to occupy their time at home. Plus, most people no longer want to cook meals completely from scratch, but want to add shortcuts and complements. There has been a bigger health focus during the pandemic, especially amongst the 20–30 year-olds. Healthy, quick energy foods vs. snickers bars. I was recently a judge for the From the Ground Up a new food show here in B.C. and I judged 33 new food and beverage products for home consumption—sauces, marinades, energy snacks, low sugar, gluten free, healthy fats. I'm surprised and delighted by the health focus as well as the focus on sourcing.

Women are still taking more responsibility for child rearing and most likely pet care. Creating food products in shared, rented commercial kitchens gives us so much more flexibility. We can own our brands and businesses from home and small kitchen rentals. AND as women gain more equality of income, we gain our rightful status as consumers, so more products will be designed and created for us. I believe that women tend to be more collaborative partners in business and many prefer partnerships over solo ventures. In partnerships, we have more time to focus on home.

What has been the most difficult obstacle to overcome? Does the obstacle still exist for entrepreneurs?

Entrepreneurs need to figure out their balance of creating, leading, navigating and resilience on one side, with listening, learning and paying attention to staff and customers on the other. Now, women need to add to this: expressing ourselves with confidence in who we are, versus trying to blend in with "the guys". For example, we grew quickly at Vij's and, before I knew it, we had a management team that met every week: me and three men. The men get loud and animated and raised their voices in disagreement—sometimes even banged their hands on the table in frustration. When I get frustrated, stretched and stressed, I get watery-eyed and teardrops roll down my cheeks. This was seen as a weakness. I even saw one manager roll his eyes at my one tear—as if the patience required to put up with my one tear was a waste of his time. So, I made it a point to announce to our management team that, as a woman, I express my frustrations and stresses via a few tear drops and they are to respect my ways. Otherwise, if they are willing to stop raising their voices, yelling or banging and shutting me down before I finish my sentence, then I too am willing to work at not tearing up. We women get to define what is perceived as our strengths and weaknesses. My motto I learned from my mother, in order: Firm, Kind, Respectful. Practice this and you will get way more back from your staff and customers.

What mistake have you learned the most from?

I react too quickly sometimes. I don't let things that need to sit within me for a while actually sit. I want a resolution faster than the situation and people are ready to move. I rush people emotionally.

Can you describe the moment you knew you were going to be successful in this field?

I moved to Vancouver in February 1995 and, with no experience, took over the kitchen of a 14-seat restaurant. In April 1995 we won "Best Asian" restaurant from Vancouver Magazine. Granted there weren't as many Asian restaurants around back then, but it was a big deal and I knew the newly formed Meeru-Vikram team was going to be a success.

What should the next wave of new entrepreneurs know about starting their own business?

Figure out how you can best be "you" as an entrepreneur-human being. Many bosses see employees based on how they can best serve the business. Many bosses see customers as "cha-ching". Because they take on the financial, emotional and physical stresses of starting their own businesses, it becomes all about them. And this is understandable. But this isn't the best way to keep staff motivated and emotionally invested. Figure out how you work best in terms of your strengths and what you enjoy doing. Otherwise, you burn out or become cold. I know that I am not a solo entrepreneur. I like partnerships of two. The financial, bookkeeping and customer service side isn't something I particularly enjoy. I love human resources. I love doing family or climate change-focused community cooking events, not TV competitions. I love being holed up with my kitchen staff. Vikram and I divide according to our strengths and trust the other to do their job.

WE BRING FOOD TO LIFE

Local restaurants are at the heart of our communities. Catering to small businesses, we are your partner in foodservice. With all of the products you need, flexible payment options and no delivery minimums, we are ready when you are.



NO DELIVERY MINIMUMS

For non-contract customers on their scheduled delivery days.

Learn More at Sysco.ca/delivery

Sysco
At the heart of food and service

HIGH LINER
FOODSERVICE™

Pan-Sear Selects®
Garlic & Herb
Butterfly Shrimp



HUGELY SATISFYING SHRIMP



Ovencrunch®
Buffalo Style Shrimp
with Frank's Red Hot®

High Liner® Shrimp.
A big addition to your menu.

Easy to Execute

Pre-seasoned and pre-portioned. Requires minimal labour and creates no waste.

Super Sustainable

High Liner shrimp is guaranteed BAP 2-Star Certified.

Menu Versatility

Easily customizable, giving you the ability to create multiple menu offerings.

BAP CERTIFIED

highlinerculinary.com | 1-877-991-3474

SEAFOOD IS *Better*®