MENU

CANADA'S FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE

RC Show 2023
HEART, HUSTLE & HIGHLIGHTS

In Conversation with **CHEF IMRUN TEXEIRA** on **WANDERLUST & MENTAL HEALTH**

SPOTLIGHT ON ATLANTIC CANADA: The view from the East on CEBA loan repayments, labour and more

The Art of Welcoming: **ENGAGING** the **2SLGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY** with authenticity



THE ULTIMATE: *Remembering Peter Oliver*

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-AT-LARGE

In April, Restaurants Canada hosted its first fully-in-person RC Show in Toronto and the response exceeded our team's boldest projections. It seemed you couldn't turn a corner without running into huddles of people hugging, laughing or in the midst of intense conversation. It was the vibe our industry truly owns, and one of the things we've all missed most. It's clear to me that RC Show is not just another conference or tradeshow. It's an annual celebration that's just for us.

There were some big changes in Show programming this year that clearly resonated with attendees. The Speaker Stage sessions were busy, with standing room only for many. The programming team prioritized main stage spaces for "big tent" topic sessions and leadership panels as well as for specialized and emerging industry segments and distinct industry groups. All were of the highest quality and very well attended which, for me, shows that we are learning to step outside our fine dining, quick service or fast casual professional and content tracks to hear and learn from others. It was great to see and there will be more of this to come.

This year's RC Show competitions (eight of them!) showcased the industry's best, brightest and boldest, with new collaborative competition styles that only furthered the stakes and the energizing effect on the captivated audiences. Corporate partners and sponsors showed outstanding engagement and support for the Show and competitions, evidence that these relationships have endured and matured in spite of several very challenging years. We are all grateful for their support and the role they play in helping our industry grow and shine.

In this issue of MENU, I encourage you to take the time to read the moving legacy portrait of Canadian hospitality giant Peter Oliver, told by some of the people who knew him best. Richard Alexander, newly promoted to Restaurants Canada's Executive VP Government Relations and Public Affairs role, shares an update from Eastern Canada. Hear from Chef Tre Sanderson on what's next for the Restaurants Canada Culinary Excellence Award winner and Garland Culinary Competition judge. Chef Imrun Texeira talks family, food and mental health and Chef Megan Roberts shares a personal reflection on the intersection of race and mental health. Operators can learn more about welcoming the 2SLGBTQIA+ community into their restaurants year-round and hear from AMK Global, one of Restaurants Canada's newest affinity partners offering affordable, expert support for hiring international talent. For more on RC Show, read the special section in this issue and be sure to check out all of the award winners and our top picks from the Show exhibition floor.

As the new President and CEO, my primary objectives are to unify the voice and restore predictability to the Canadian foodservice industry, and to enhance relevance and value of all Restaurants Canada programs, products and services for members, including MENU magazine.

As MENU's editor-at-large, I'm inviting member feedback, story pitches and requests for coverage on the issues that matter most to you at media@restaurantscanada.org.

Yours in a unified, empowered Canadian foodservice industry,





Kelly Higginson
President & CEO

Summer 2023
Volume 8 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 media@restaurantscanada.org.

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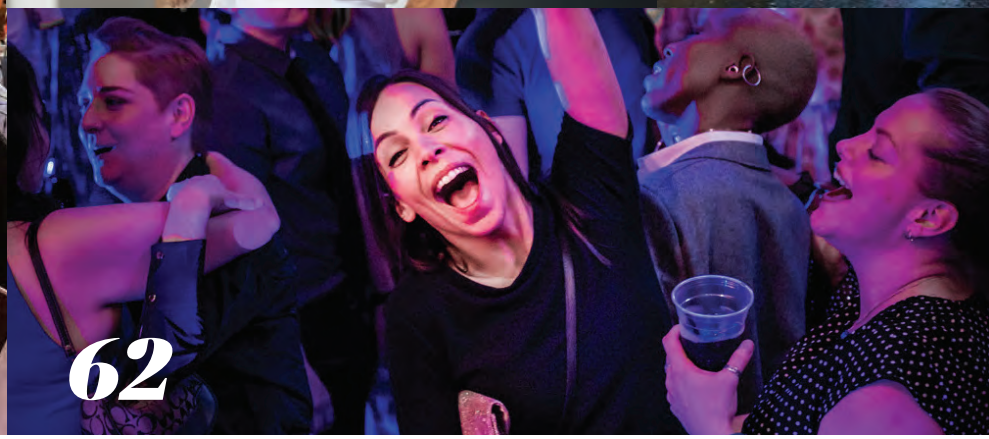
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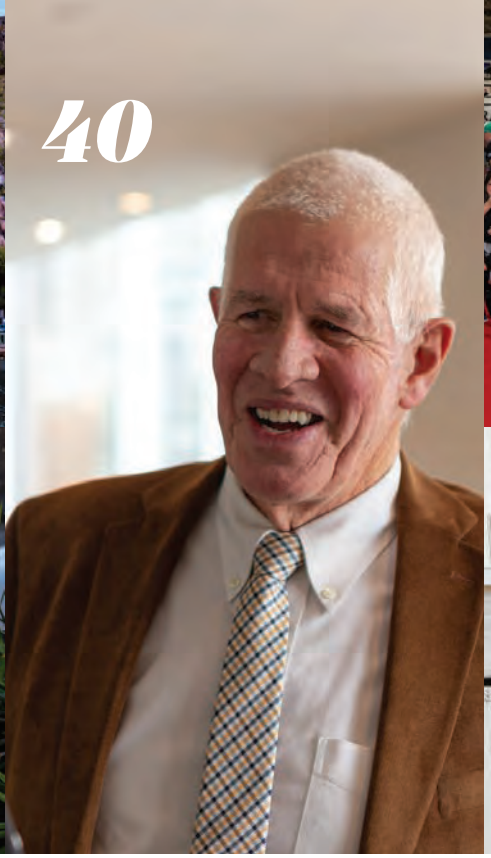
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MENU

THE PASS

CANADA'S 100 BEST

The 2023 Canada's Best Restaurants list is out! Congratulations to all of our members who earned their place on this prestigious list that celebrates Canadian restaurant excellence.

Check out the list at: canadas100best.com

Food Day CANADA

Putting Canada on the menu August 5, 2023. Food Day Canada engages and inspires everyone to shop, cook and dine Canadian.

Join in and celebrate at: fooddaycanada.ca

The Prince Edward Island International Shellfish Festival is back in Charlottetown September 14-17, 2023. Restaurants Canada will be there to support the local foodservice industry as it celebrates the festival's 25th year and PEI's world-renowned reputation for supreme shellfish.

Learn more at: peishellfish.com

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TASTE CANADA AWARDS • LES LAURÉATS DES SAVEURS DU CANADA

The Taste Canada Awards are the country's only national, bilingual food writing awards, inspiring readers to discover delicious recipes and diverse food stories written from a Canadian perspective. The 2023 Shortlist is out and the winners will be announced during their Awards Soirée October 30, 2023.

Follow @tastecanadaawards to learn more!

RESTAURANTS CANADA ON DEMAND: WEBINARS

Navigating Nova Scotia Workforce Challenges with Provincial Supports

Hosted by Restaurants Canada in partnership with the Restaurants Association of Nova Scotia (RANS) and the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council, watch and learn about provincial training and hiring support programs available to Nova Scotia operators and hear from two industry members who share their experience accessing and implementing these provincial programs.

Top of the Prep List: Workers' Mental Health & Resources to Support Them

Hosted by Restaurants Canada and moderated by The Canadian Mental Health Association, this webinar explores different strategies to help operators support staff mental health within the dynamic foodservice environment. Expert panelists share valuable insights and practical solutions for creating a mentally healthy workplace while tackling the labour shortage.

Available to watch now:

TUTTOFOOD Milan Showcases the Best in Sustainable, Ethical and Global F&B Innovation







Restaurants Canada and MENU magazine are proud media partners of TUTTOFOOD, an international tradeshow focused on food, and HostMilano, a world exhibition dedicated to the hospitality and catering sectors. As part of Restaurants Canada's commitment to forging strategic partnerships with the international foodservice community, a team of four staff attended TUTTOFOOD in Milan, Italy in early May.

This year's TUTTOFOOD marked the ninth edition of the biannual international trade event that has already become the most important platform for the food supply chain industry in Europe and beyond. With over 83,000 visitors registered from the food and beverage trade industry, and 20 per cent of them coming from 132 different countries including Canada, Spain, the USA, France, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, China, Romania, the UK, Vietnam, Kazakhstan and more, the event brought the global industry together for a comprehensive overview of innovation in the industry.

TUTTOFOOD spanned seven exhibition centres in Milan, Italy's Fiera Milano exhibition grounds, broken down into 12 zones including TUTTODAIRY, TUTTODRINK, TUTTOFROZEN, TUTTOFRUIT, TUTTOGROCERY, TUTTOHEALTH, TUTTOMEAT, TUTTOOIL, TUTTOPASTA, TUTTOSEAFOOD, TUTTOSWEET and TUTTOWINE.

Conscious innovation a top priority at TUTTOFOOD 2023

Similar to the RC Show, TUTTOFOOD leverages consumer trends to shape its programming, and with consumers focusing on a healthy body and planet, the Restaurants Canada delegation saw that trend reflected in TUTTOFOOD's offerings with sustainable, clean label, better-for-you and responsibly-sourced ingredients and food products at the top of the agri-food industry's list.

With the aim of promoting the fight against food waste and facilitating healthier food choices, the newest edition of this year's TUTTOFOOD was the Green Trail. This path was marked by bold graphic wayfinding designed to help visitors to discover green, plant-based, zero-mile products, as well as those dedicated to food intolerances, throughout all areas of the event and in exhibitor stands.

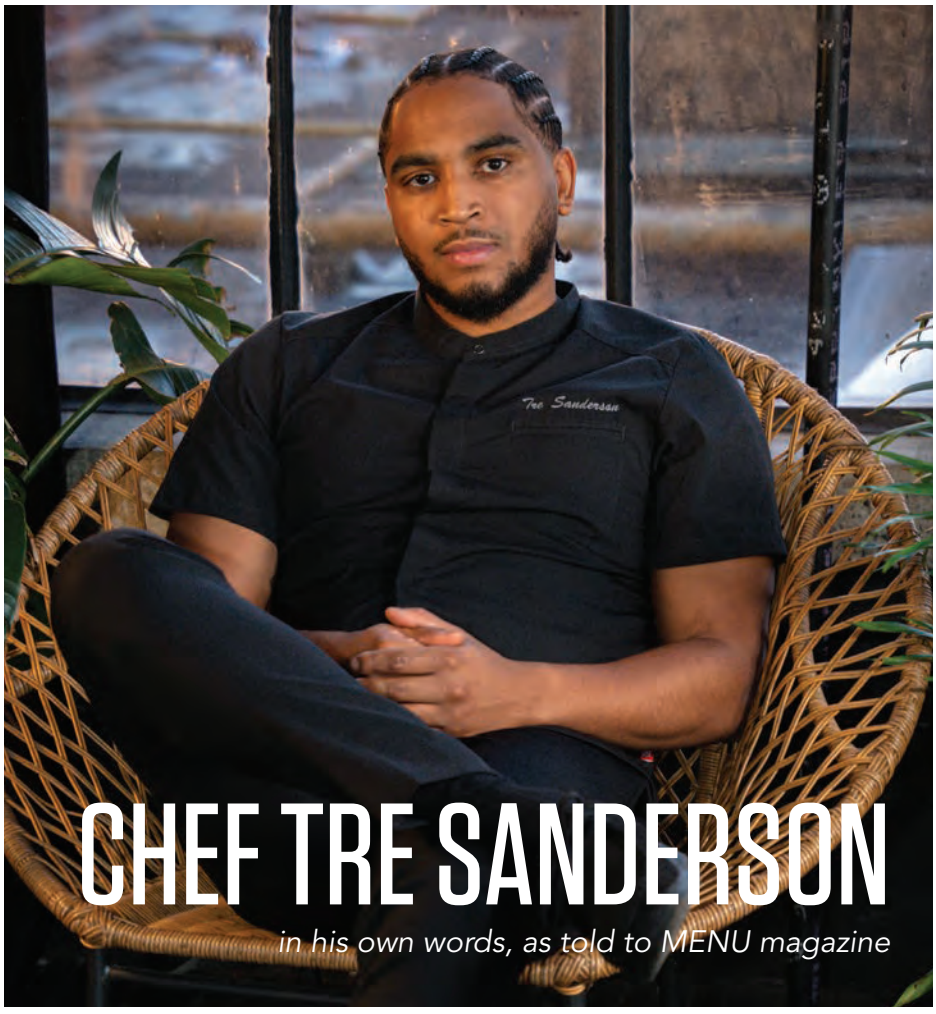
Present at the international table

According to Tracey Mills Fletcher, VP Marketing and Growth at Restaurants Canada, forging connections with international foodservice and hospitality partners to learn, engage and create new opportunities for Canadian operators is an important part of the Association's strategic offering for its members. "It's time to share expertise and explore new ways to innovate, evolve and operate more sustainably. The Canadian foodservice industry has a lot to be proud of and a lot to offer to the global conversation and community."

TUTTOFOOD MILANO

THE UPSETTER

Chef Tre Sanderson still seems a little stunned by his meteoric rise to the top of Canada's culinary scene. In 2022, he became the first Black chef to win the Food Network Canada's 10th season *Top Chef Canada* competition. In just the first half of this year, he's made the Top 30 under 30 list in *Foodservice and Hospitality* magazine, took his place on the esteemed judging panel at the Garland Canada Culinary Competition and took home the prestigious Restaurants Canada Culinary Award of Excellence.



CHEF TRE SANDERSON

in his own words, as told to MENU magazine

On the early days...

I started in this industry in my home kitchen with my mom, watching how she put meals for us together, using certain flavours and different techniques. I was new to it because I was so young, but trying different flavours and seeing everything come together got me really excited. When dinner came around... it was so delicious, and it got me thinking, "Wow... how do you do this? So, I got into it. I wasn't cooking big meals for my family... I was the youngest of six, so I was the cook-ish.

My mother wasn't always around to hold my hand while I helped make a meal, so I kind of did my thing in the kitchen and found my way. I made a lot of mistakes, but that was the beginning—just diving into the kitchen and just experimenting with different pantry items I really had no idea how to use. I just put things

together and ate and experimented my way to getting better at the craft of Jamaican cuisine as the years went on, because that's the kind of food we grew up on and the food that I love.

On Jamaican and Caribbean cuisine...

Jamaican cuisine is so unique—the flavour and the process that goes into it. Every ingredient is used in a specific way, and it's all thought out. It's technical. It's delicious. It's been on the back burner for so long in the culinary world. We don't really look at Caribbean cuisine as upper-echelon or Michelin star cuisine. You don't see those restaurants around the world. But I believe there's so much flavour, technique and amazing ingredients behind it—it deserves to shine now.

Take curried goat, for example. So many different spices go into this amazing curry... burning the curry off in the oil before that nice meat gets into that nice hot pan with the garlic, the onions and the thyme. I love when that oil gets hot and the curry starts to burn and the aromas fill the air with amazing scents. The process is an ingredient too.

Jamaican and Caribbean dishes are very humble. They don't take much to curate or make. Dumplings are just water and flour with a bit of salt that get formed and then tossed into a boiling broth, but the little things that sound so simple just come together and it's so delicious. This cuisine has been passed on from generation to generation, and its future is now.

I really want to try to push Caribbean food to a whole other level and get it into hospitality programs. There's not a lot of education behind Caribbean or African cuisine. The culinary capitals of the world are mostly very Eurocentric—French, Italian—which are great, but I really want to promote Caribbean cuisine and make people understand how truly amazing it is.

There's a general lack of understanding, and some difficulty sourcing the ingredients we use. You don't find a lot of these ingredients in a typical store—you'd have to go to an international market. There is also a lack of amazing, high-end Caribbean restaurants, in Toronto, at least, that are showcasing our amazing flare. I want to open a restaurant where you walk in and you feel like you've left your city and arrived on an Island where everything's so delicious, from mangoes and plantain to breadfruit. These are like iconic ingredients that have been used over decades and generations. There are so many things you could do with these ingredients that are being utilized on the Island and brought here to Canada.

I'm Jamaican. If you look at Jamaican cuisine, you learn that the dishes are not just "dishes". They have history behind them, and some of them were part of the slave era. A lot of people don't know that Ackee and Saltfish is the national dish of Jamaica because of the history of slaves, where it was brought on boats from England to the Islands. There's an educational aspect to the food. Whenever I present a dish, we talk about the ingredients. A lot of ingredients are coming from Africa as well, but also England, because of colonization. There are so many aspects from each of them that come from around the world, but they land there somehow, some way, on these amazing Islands. It's a beautiful thing. Canada doesn't really have a national dish. The ingredients are cool, and we have our nice mushrooms that grow in Saskatchewan. We have nice birch syrup that grows up in the Yukon—we have different and unique ingredients. But there are so many cultures in Canada, you can't really pinpoint a national cuisine.

On *Top Chef Canada* and the highs and lows of competition...

When it came to throwing down for *Top Chef Canada*, the biggest thing was seeing that I actually had a chance—I was at a point in my career where I really felt, "My time is now." I'd been working under chefs for so long, I never had the opportunity to kind of run a restaurant or have my voice on a menu, but I did a lot of my own, best cooking at home. When the time came, I saw it as an opportunity to showcase what Jamaican and Caribbean food is all about. Those who watched the show could see that all my dishes had a Caribbean twist; a different vibe. I wanted to just go hard and really demonstrate that all is possible, on my terms, with this kind of cuisine.

Competing was a really good feeling. It felt like my voice could be heard a little bit louder, and Caribbean cuisine could be part of the future of the culinary world. And, when I had the opportunity to get on the plane as one of







the final four, the whole time I was just thinking, "I'm going to an Island… Caribbean flair. There's no way I can blow this. This is what I'm trying to do. This is what I'm trying to promote. This is the cuisine I know." I just knew this was an opportunity I could not blow.

Since winning, doors have definitely opened for me, and I've been recognized. Being the first Black chef to win—a kind of pioneer—has been big. It's also pushed the kind of cuisine I'm promoting and helped people understand it a little bit better and respect it more. I don't want to hold everyone's hands and be like, "Hey, this is the way", but I definitely want to inspire and help where I can mentor and really try to be one of the faces of what's to come. I don't want to say

Being the first Black chef to win—a kind of pioneer—has been big. It's also pushed the kind of cuisine I'm promoting and helped people understand it a little bit better and respect it more. I don't want to hold everyone's hands and be like, "Hey, this is the way", but I definitely want to inspire and help where I can mentor and really try to be one of the faces of what's to come."

I want to take full responsibility, but I feel like I have a little bit of responsibility because it's a big thing for me and a huge thing for the future.

Before the Garland Canada Culinary Competition at RC Show, I'd never been a judge. I'd never really broken down a dish to say it needed more salt or more acidity. I'd never had to do that to anybody. I must say though, it's a very humbling experience because I was a competitor not too long ago, and I was a first-time judge. I didn't really want to be too hard on these competitors because I know how hard it is.

On what's next...

The Islands are very touristy. People go to Jamaica, they go to St. Lucia and Barbados to visit a place where it's hot and beautiful. These are destination places where you go to escape reality in some way. I want to do that in a dining context. There are a lot of great little gems in the city, but I feel like it's so copy-and-paste. People are doing the same thing. Beautiful concepts and beautiful restaurants… but it's the same food. We all like pasta. I get it. But there's so much more. I've worked alongside some amazing chefs, but I've never had the opportunity to bring my vision to light. It's time for me to do that.

I want my restaurant to feel like you're on the Island. I want the scent of the ocean in my restaurant because it says a beautiful thing. I want people to feel so relaxed when they come in, that it's almost like a vacation. The experience, from the service to the food, has to be on point. It's resort vibes on a whole other level.

Follow Chef Tre Sanderson:
@tre.sanderson





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*Source: Technomic, Centre of the Plate Report, Canada 2021

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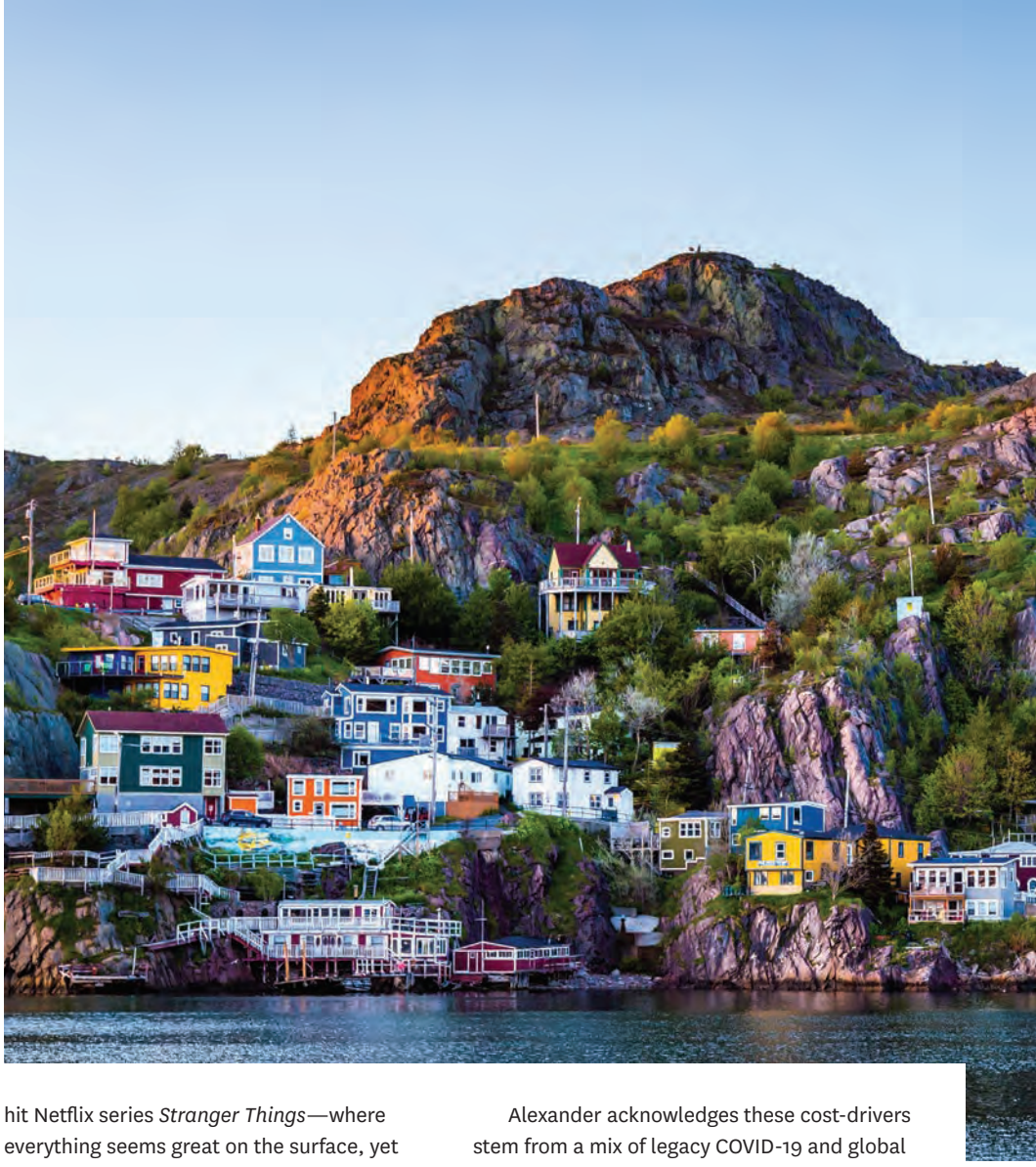
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INDUSTRY UPDATE: ATLANTIC CANADA



Prior to the pandemic, Atlantic Canada was digging in deep on regional and culinary tourism. The region had long been looking to the success of neighbouring New England states like Vermont and Maine for ways to attract a greater share of the tourist trade seeking maritime experiences, food and culture. And it was working.

Now, as the region awaits the return of summer crowds, high costs on everything from hotels to car rentals to food are slimming hopes for near-term recovery. In fact, price increases in Atlantic Canada continue to outpace inflation in other provinces (with the notable exception of Manitoba). So, even if the crowds of visitors do return to Eastern Canada for their summer holidays and weekend getaways this season as hoped, high prices will not only affect the range of businesses they patronize, but operator profitability.

In his annual foodservice industry forecast for 2022-23, Chris Elliott, Restaurants Canada Chief Economist & Vice President, Research, likened this phenomenon to the "Upside Down", a dark, parallel dimension from the hit Netflix series *Stranger Things*—where everything seems great on the surface, yet underneath, something is terribly wrong. So, hotels are booked and restaurants are filling up, but the cost-to-profit ratio is offside, with operators taking the hit to avoid scaring away returning customers with real-world menu prices.

A Maritimer born and bred, Restaurants Canada's newly appointed Executive VP-Government Relations and Public Affairs (previously VP-Atlantic), Richard Alexander, is frustrated and deeply concerned. "The industry is in crisis. If you look at some of the stats, half of the local table service restaurants are just barely breaking even. From cooking oil, to beef to chicken to fish to propane, everything has gone up to the point where it's eviscerated profits. Even restaurants with a solid history of performance—good location, established, return clientele—are struggling. You can only raise menu prices so much before people start to say, "Oh, it's too expensive to go out". So, until we get some relief from inflationary costs, it's going to be a very tough ride."

Alexander acknowledges these cost-drivers stem from a mix of legacy COVID-19 and global conflict supply chain issues and that Restaurants Canada has represented their effect on the foodservice industry to both federal and provincial governments, asking for support. "In Atlantic Canada, the biggest success on that front came out of New Brunswick, with the government agreeing to provide a hiring subsidy that allows restaurants to access $500 for every new hire to offset training and onboarding costs, a total of $500,000 in available funding. This program is being administrated by Restaurants Canada, and it does help; however, the reality is that it can cost up to $3,000 to bring on and train a new employee."

Restaurants Canada has been actively working with the other three Atlantic provincial governments and is leveraging several underutilized programs to provide immediate supports for the industry, with some success, Alexander notes. "We've been able to tailor several existing government hiring programs for the restaurant industry and restaurants are taking advantage of those. These programs

have helped provide some cost relief on both the labour and the recruitment side and have made it a little easier to access existing labour pools within the province. For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador we were able to partner with the Association of New Canadians to connect with refugees from Ukraine who had restaurant experience. We did job matching and that proved to be a really strong program in this province. Every little bit helps, and some of these programs might ease the pressure just enough to take a business from deciding to close to having the support to wait for things to get better."

Asked what he's hearing from regional operators, Alexander is clear. "They're shocked. A lot of them have been in business for 20 or 30 years and they've never seen anything like this. I mean, there was a moment in time just before the holidays when the price of lettuce had increased 400 per cent. How do you recover from that? I see the frustration on the faces and in the voices of members I talk to on a regular basis."

As the industry awaits the federal response to Restaurants Canada's request to extend the CEBA loan repayment deadline of December 31, 2023, Alexander fears many operators cannot wait much longer to make a decision on the viability of their business. "We're not looking for a handout. We are asking for a graduated paydown of the loan over a period of 36 months, including the forgivable part of the loan. This would provide an incentive for restaurants to stay in business, which would increase the number of restaurants that will be able to pay it back. It's good for the taxpayer, it's good for government and it's good for the industry."

ATLANTIC OPERATORS WEIGH IN

Jeremy Bonia
Sommelier and Co-Owner of Raymonds, The Merchant Tavern and Portage (NFLD) & Restaurants Canada Board Chair

Atlantic Canada is geographically isolated and a lot of places like PEI, Newfoundland or rural or landlocked communities in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are seasonal operations. They're relying on either tourist or business travel, and a lot of that happens between June and September, so you have less than half the year to try and make your living. It's really a hope for a good summer, good weather, good tourist travel, increased numbers and people coming out to eat, but every day it seems there's something else like the excise tax increase on alcohol or rising food costs… It's bad.

We see some of the highest costs for food and alcohol outside of Northern Canada. It's a struggle, and a tough business on the best of days. When we came out of COVID, everybody was obviously weakened by that and now we're looking forward to trying to get back to some sense of normalcy. We've not fully recovered yet. A lot of people had to take out loans or borrow money or get CEBA loans—these were all great benefits, and we were happy to get them, but our businesses are just starting up again. We're very sensitive to increases, whether they're price increases—taxes or insurance—any of those things can really hurt your business. It's an analogy for COVID itself—a lot of people's immune systems were compromised and weakened or they're still dealing with the effects of long COVID. Our businesses are no different.

Everybody wants to pay back their loans at some point, but it's got to be structured in a way to make it fair for people to pay. It seems like a long time, but it hasn't been long enough for businesses to come back. Very few people are operating with any profit margin right now. Restaurants Canada has the numbers, and it's a very tiny percentage. Some operators are trying to grin and bear it, and others are getting out of the business altogether and we're seeing it – we're seeing closures.

Chef Bill Pratt
Owner, Chef Inspired Group of Restaurants (NS)

We are not making money right now with skyrocketing food costs as high as they are and everyone I talk to in the industry is screaming the same tune. Labour shortages are making it impossible to operate fully and generate a profit. Nobody wants to close their business, so we all just go further into debt. Let's stop talking about "How Sales have come back to pre-pandemic levels or better" and start talking about how catastrophic our EBITDA is instead!

The CEBA loan repayment deadline is horrific timing no matter how you slice it. Restaurateurs are like squirrels tucking away our profit nuts from the summer and fall so we can get through the long Canadian winters, and now we get kicked in the gonads with slow winter sales, CEBA and Q4 HST remittances all due at the same time.

What keeps me up at night? One word: debt. The fear of failing has always been part of the restaurant industry's worries and with CEBA around our necks, it only helps to pull us down. Let's not forget that these CEBA loans were used to pay bills in order to keep the lights on during COVID while we were locked out by government restrictions. We incurred this debt because we followed government regulations that restricted us from making money to pay our bills and now we have to face the piper because of it.

Skyrocketing food prices are my number one worry, followed by CEBA remittances and labour shortages—all of them add up to a Voodoo Nightmare Cocktail.

EXCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR RECRUITMENT SOLUTION

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In response to operator feedback, Restaurants Canada recently announced its partnership with AMK Global to help members streamline the international recruitment process and fill full-time positions at an affordable rate.

More than ever, the Canadian foodservice sector is actively seeking to connect with and welcome new Canadians to help close the labour gap. While the process can be time consuming, complicated and expensive, it is no longer a last resort for many operators. As found in Restaurants Canada's latest Restaurants Outlook Survey: Q4 2022, tackling the labour shortage crisis will be among the top priorities for foodservice operators in 2023, with 53 per cent of respondents looking to attract or hire new staff, and operators sharing that they have been forced to reduce operating hours to account for the lack of staff.

Based in Canada and the UK, AMK Global is an immigration and recruitment company with proven hospitality and foodservice industry experience navigating the complexities of the Canadian immigration process to ensure fit-to-role and long-term retention. They are fully registered with the CAPIC and ICCRC, with deep experience in restaurant and hotel staff recruitment with boots on the ground in 12 cities around the world. AMK offers end-to-end service including managing Service Canada applications, candidate shortlisting and helping international talent obtain their LMIAs and Work Permits.

Peter Carruthers, Executive Director, International Talent Recruitment at AMK Global, says that since the announcement of their partnership with Restaurants Canada, they've fielded one or two new calls each day. "We have employers reaching out on a daily basis and they are experiencing a deep level of need. Labour is the number one issue an employer in hospitality is currently facing and locating talent is a huge challenge. We present employers with international talent sourced from Mumbai, Sri Lanka and Dubai as well as other locations around the world. Our candidates have five metrics in place: references, employment history, biometric approval, criminal record clearance and English level proficiency."

One of AMK Global's key differentiators is that they are not just an experienced recruitment agency, but also an accredited immigration agency. From their head office in Mississauga, Ontario, they represent employers across Canada as well as in the U.S. Their streamlined services simplify the process for their restaurant, hotel and resort clients, connecting them with internationally sourced talent for full-time, back-of-house roles including cooks, bakers, butchers, pastry chefs, sushi makers, and dessert and pastry specialists as well as essential front-of-house and housekeeping roles. All at one of the most affordable rates in Canada.

We are experienced at helping our customers understand the processes of working with Service Canada," Carruthers

explains. “That’s where we really step up to the plate. We are responsive and hold our customers’ and employers’ hands through the entire 24-month process. From the five or six months it takes for a person to land in Canada from Mumbai, going through the LMIA process, the work permit process and the employer onboarding to the full two-year term. We make sure things are going well, and at the 18-month point, we confirm whether our clients and employers would like to begin a second wave. About 8 out of 10 people choose to stay on with their employer when the mandatory work term ends.”

Carruthers notes that, while many employers are intimidated by the paperwork and the process before they begin, they soon realize the benefit of an experienced service partner. AMK manages every aspect of talent sourcing and administration on their behalf, down to candidate shortlisting and video interview scheduling. “Our employers get to meet their candidates online. One employer asked that candidates bring a boning knife and a whole chicken to the interview and had them demonstrate their butchery skills on screen. That was interesting, and very beneficial for the employer. We need to ensure the fit is there. It’s about culture and it’s about human lives, not just function.”

Carruthers emphasizes that the “why” of AMK’s business is as important as the “what”. “We are introducing internationally sourced people to a life in Canada”, he says. “We’re not dealing with machines, but human beings. We refer several hundred people a year, and I sleep well knowing that we’re introducing people to Canadian values and a Canadian way of life.”





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RC Show

Restaurants Canada



HEART, HUSTLE & HIGHLIGHTS

BY CHRIS SZEGO



The imagination, ingenuity and overwhelming dedication of the foodservice and hospitality industry was on full display at this year's RC Show, held at Toronto's Enercare Centre, April 10-12th 2023. Aspiring, new and experienced foodservice professionals had the opportunity to gain leadership insights while meeting and networking with new colleagues, friends and suppliers. Buyers could shop more than 1,000 vendor and brand booths exhibiting the newest products, technologies and trends across the show floor, with heart and hustle on parade in every aisle.

Over 22,000 guests visited RC Show 2023 throughout the three jam-packed days, taking in the sights, sounds, and above all the tastes of Canada's largest foodservice and hospitality show. Exciting and topical programming covered the gamut from environmental sustainability, food and beverage trends, health and wellness, the importance of inclusion and diversity, as well as current and coming technological shifts.

This year's attendance exceeded pre-pandemic levels, a reminder that the resilience and innovation of foodservice and hospitality cannot be contained. It was a celebration of the incredible Heart & Hustle that powers the industry as a whole.











RC SHOW PAVILIONS

Always lively and exciting, the products and solutions found in the **Bar & Beverage Pavilion** presented by Labatt Breweries of Canada and San Pelligrino gave attendees the chance to refresh their palates and sample unique libations.

The culinary offerings found in the **Canada Pavilion** explored the many terroirs and techniques from coast to coast, and organizations like presenting sponsors Dairy Farmers of Canada and Chicken Farmers of Canada demonstrated the results of leading national agricultural practices. **The Ontario Pavilion** hosted many new, sustainable products and local producers exhibited by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), with support from Dairy Farmers of Ontario, while the **Québec Pavilion** shone a spotlight on the diversity and variety of Québec cuisine.

The **Coffee, Tea & Sweets Pavilion** presented by Dairy Farmers of Canada saw regular latte art demonstrations hosted by Zuccarini and showcased the best and finest beverages, equipment and treats. Visitors to the **Eco Pavilion**, presented by LEAF, Too Good To Go, Good Leaf and Fairtrade Canada, accessed the latest innovations designed to increase sustainability, reduce waste and save energy. The **Tech Pavilion** was the place to go to test-drive the latest in global restaurant technology from host and delivery robots to presenting sponsor TouchBistro's robust, Canadian-designed restaurant management system.

Italy and Brazil were the feature countries at the **World Pavilion**, which presented international ingredients and food styles through top-notch ambassadorial brand activations and including presenting sponsors Bellavita, San Pelligrino and the Italian Trade Agency. The bustling **Design Pavilion** connected attendees with the concepts, fabricators and suppliers who bring insight, atmosphere and flair to restaurant design.



RC SHOW STAGES

Jam-packed with panel discussions, fireside chats and in-depth discussions on the most pressing industry issues, the **Speaker Stage** presented by American Express Canada, Uber Eats, Groupex Canada, San Pelligrino and FCC, hosted foodservice innovators and standouts. Category leaders delivered experienced wisdom on customer engagement, revenue diversification and segment performance. Noted personalities explored the rise of positive labour trends, initiatives for physical and mental health, and sustainability solutions. Diversity, equality and inclusion enterprises like the Foodpreneur Lab, Indigenous Culinary of Associated Nations, and The Re-Seasoning Coalition served up timely and topical examples of best practices to support implementation for national operators and teams.

Presented by Garland Canada, Dairy Farmers of Ontario, Gordon Food Service, Chicken Farmers of Canada, High Liner Foodservice and Club House for Chefs, the **Culinary Stage**, curated by **Jasmine Baker** and hosted by **Michelle Jobin**, was home to virtuoso demonstrations and exciting culinary competitions, including the crowd-favourite Garland Culinary Competition and the qualifying contests for the Canadian national Bocuse d'Or and World Pastry Cup teams for the very







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first time. Presentations and live activations from High Liner Foods and star chefs demonstrated how-to techniques to add flair to service and selection. On the other end of the 350,000 square foot show floor, the **Workshop Stage** presented by Freehouse Collective gave hands-on demonstrations, master classes, pairings and tastings, including a Tuesday Takeover content series by bar and beverage master duo Christina Veira and Evelyn Chick.

Show attendees looking for the newest services and technologies flocked to the **Learning Lounge** presented by OTEC for sessions on design and construction, employee mental health and wellbeing, menu engineering and the latest in technological and guest experience innovation. **StudioEx**, hosted by **Azalea Hart**, was home to Restaurants Canada's inaugural **Growth Series presented by FCC**, which delivered three full days of programming designed to support operators and F&B innovators in diversifying their revenue opportunities. The host of speakers and industry experts delivered concentrated wisdom in the form of data-driven insights and resources from preparing for financing and unlocking hidden profits with catering to rethinking brick-and-mortar restaurants and money mindfulness. Other sessions explored single-use plastics solutions, discussed the tipping debate, and presented a special panel on Black Excellence in Foodservice.

Hosted by CTV's **Cristina Carpio**, the **Bar & Beverage Stage** presented by Labatt Breweries of Canada and San Pelligrino unpacked the details of the alcohol and beverage business. From low-ABV drinks to coffee, from beer through spirits to wine, the B&B stage delivered hours of exciting competitions, profound leadership experience and actionable discoveries and insights.

TUESDAY TAKEOVER

Bar & Beverage Ambassadors **Evelyn Chick** and **Christina Veira** produced a special workshop series for new bar entrepreneurs, in which industry leaders explored the best methods to build a better bar culture, including sessions on how to increase revenue, maintain a healthy work environment and create a better customer experience. The takeover also discussed the importance of building a low-and-no menu and the specifics of spirit and wine sales, interspersed with presentations on design, sustainability, and advanced bar techniques. The carefully curated panels and workshops were a deep dive of all the main concerns of today's bar owners.







EVENTS & FEATURES

One of the biggest draws of RC Show is the chance to interact with the industry at large. Hardworking foodservice operators and suppliers had a chance to re-encounter one another on the show floor (or meet for the first time!) during workshops and activations and at the many high-octane networking events. The **Opening Night Reception** presented by Labatt Breweries of Canada, Fords Gin, High Liner Foodservice, Gordon Food Service and San Pelligrino in Heritage Court was a rollicking party, with tastes and treats delivered by the incredible assortment of top food trucks represented in the **Food Truck'N Experience**, presented by JB Innovative Solutions Inc.

The **RC Pop UP Experience**, curated by Chef Matt Dean Pettit of Trinity Market and artfully conceived by Yellow Bird Design with support from Kwik SIgns, Caesarstone and Angelik, was the place to catch up with new friends and new flavours. Featuring an all-day cafe, restaurant and a pop-up bar powered by Chase, the Pop UP Experience presented innovative food and beverage combos in a stylish and comfortable environment blending indoor and outdoor features including a heart-shaped photo wall. The kitchens were tricked out with best-in-show cooking and kitchen equipment from Garland Canada and crave-worthy equip-

ment from True Refrigeration. Attendees could book tables in advance and enjoy culinary creations featuring top Canadian foods and ingredients from Dairy Farmers of Canada, Rowe Beef, High Liner Foods and more, while witnessing the newest kitchen technologies from Champion Moyer Diebel, Diversey, BUNN and more live in action.

The RC Pop UP Experience also hosted the exclusive **Top-to-Top** networking reception for industry leaders, presented by Labatt Breweries of Canada and Fords Gin and featuring an artisan cheese fondue from Dairy Farmers of Ontario and Stonetown Artisan Cheese, and outstanding fare from Rowe Beef, King Cole Duck and Seafoodia as well as libations from Ceder's Stella Artois, Corona and Corona Sunbrew and more.

Industry Night Out, presented by Labatt Breweries of Canada, Fords Gin and Uber Eats, was a much-needed opportunity to connect and let loose at the recently opened Isabelle's, a chic cocktail bar in downtown Toronto. The industry showed up to dance and toast the future of the industry after several difficult years.

Breakfast with Champions, Restaurants Canada's annual power breakfast at the Liberty Grand, opened with a special Land Acknowledgement Ceremony with Anishinaabe cultural consultant and Traditional Knowledge Keeper **Kim Wheatley**. Hosted by **Manjit Minhas**, the breakfast delivered top-notch information and inspiration over a delicious meal presented by Pepsico, Chase, Dairy Farmers of Canada, Diversey, Maple Leaf, Too Good To Go, Uber Eats, Impossible Foods and Nespresso Professional. New York restaurateur **Will Guidara** spoke about increasing profit margins by creating a superlative customer experience and The Burnt Chef Project's **Kris Hall** discussed tools and techniques to reduce the stigma of mental illness. **Trevor Lui** hosted a champion panel of industry thought leaders on the future of foodservice and hospitality, followed by the Restaurants Canada Awards of Excellence ceremony.

The **Chinese Cuisine and Hospitality Association of Canada (CCHAC)** also held their annual summit at the RC Show, where they released their analysis of the Chinese Canadian food industry and discussed challenges, solutions and trends.

RESTAURANTS CANADA AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Restaurants Canada Awards of Excellence recognize some of the industry's most extraordinary individuals and their contributions.



The **Leadership Award of Excellence** went to **Gregory Roberts**, owner and CEO of Mary Brown's Chicken and MBI Brands Inc., for embracing new opportunities and taking inventive approaches to common industry issues. In addition to creating and encouraging an environment that fosters agile, out-of-the-box thinking, Roberts continues to invest back into the communities Mary Brown's serves, demonstrating that when heart and hustle go hand in hand, anything is possible.



Chef Tre Sanderson received the **Culinary Award of Excellence** in recognition of his bold, boundless passion and continuing efforts to bring an elevated culinary experience to every plate. Sanderson set a new and consistent standard of excellence with creativity, ambition, beautiful presentation and, most importantly, delicious food. A top-tier chef and true culinary leader, Sanderson's many contributions, from his work at top restaurants to his triumph on Top Chef Canada, have blazed a brilliant trail for future chefs to follow.



Chef Imrun Texeira was granted the **Emerging Leader Award** for blazing a new, entrepreneurial path for industry talent and working to change the industry for the better. As founder of Wanderlust Private Dining, Imrun has set a new standard of excellence not only for show-stopping dishes but for his leadership, creativity and ambition while advocating for better working conditions across the industry. He is also a Canadian Ambassador for The Burnt Chef Project, where he continues to work to eradicate mental health stigma in the hospitality industry.



Sharon Hapton, CEO and Founder of Soup Sisters and Broth Brothers, was presented with the **Social Advocacy Award of Excellence**. Her dedication and hard work turned an individual effort into a national not-for-profit movement that has provided three million "Hugs in a Bowl" to feed people in need across Canada and the U.S. Her exceptional and giving spirit led to a charitable initiative that nurtures both bodies and spirits. Hapton's vision for a more generous world represents the best of social advocacy and an original recipe for long lasting change.



Janice Bartley, Founder and Executive Director of Foodpreneur Lab, received the **Innovation Service Award** for her actions to address systemic issues facing underrepresented business talent in the food sector. Foodpreneur Lab serves and supports Black entrepreneurs by providing the resources, training and mentorship they need to access the Canadian food market and grow. This influential platform and incubator promotes emerging F&B innovators and offers exciting initiatives like the Black Diaspora Box, which connects consumers with small-batch, artisanal products.

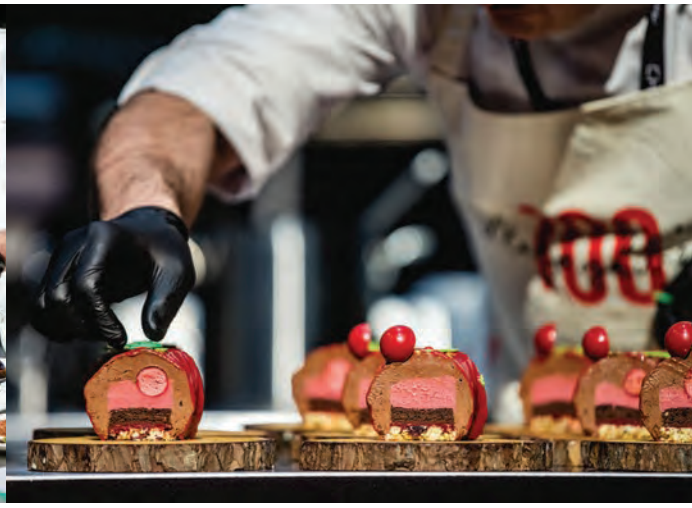


The **Innovation Product Award** went to **Sam Kashani**, Country Director, Canada of Too Good to Go, an innovative app that addresses the problem of food waste. Bridging the gap between food providers with extra stock on hand and customers in need of meals, the app has saved thousands of dollars for small businesses and consumers alike, prevented greenhouse gas emissions, and directly tackled the global problem of food waste. In a time of increasing food insecurity, Too Good to Go has connected consumers with delicious meals while increasing margins for operators.

COMPETITIONS

There's no better way to show off the Heart & Hustle of the foodservice sector than with fast-paced competitions that truly highlight the depth and breadth of creativity and skill the industry has to offer. This year's RC Show hosted returning and brand-new contests, spotlighting individual and team expertise and innovation.





Garland Canada Culinary Competition



Presented by Garland Canada and Restaurants Canada, the Garland Culinary Competition is a national contest like none other, highlighting and recognizing the country's most innovative and exciting chefs. This year, 100 chefs entered the first round, inviting culinary school judges into their homes with video demonstrations. That group was whittled down to 35, then to 12. In the end, four finalists competed on stage for more than $10,000 in cash and other prizes.

Each chef had access to a stocked pantry and was given a black box of mystery ingredients to elevate their dish and demonstrate their skills. The task was to create a dish rooted in their own background but reflecting the RC Show 2023 theme: Heart & Hustle. Hosted by Chef **Philman George** and **Michelle Jobin**, the timed contest was a dazzling display of talent and creativity.

The esteemed judges were eager to see and taste the results. Chef **Eva Chin** wanted to see both passion and technique. Chef **John Higgins** was looking for simplicity and honesty on the plate, and Chef **Tre Sanderson**, recent winner of Top Chef Canada, wanted to see how the competitors transformed their surging adrenaline into creativity.

First place went to **Shai-Ann Tyson** from the Summit Golf and Country Club. She took home $5,000, a KitchenAid blender, and more. Second was Chef **Francisco Hernández** from Hotel Birks, who won $3,000 and also the Fan Favourite prize of $500, sponsored by Club House for Chefs. Chef **Salvatore Seminerio** from The Inn at Bay Fortune came in third, winning $1,500, and runner-up Chef **Nao Akutagawa** from Quetzal took home $500.

"This contest provides a platform for the leaders of the future," said Mary Chiarot, Vice President and General Manager of Garland Canada, who presented the awards. "It's how we give back to the industry."

Bocuse d'Or & World Pastry Cup



The Bocuse d'Or is the world's most prestigious culinary competition. Every two years countries go head-to-head in a grueling battle of art, precision and skill. This year, the Culinary Stage hosted the final selection for Team Canada's 2025 Bocuse d'Or contender. Experienced, versatile, and highly skilled, the four finalists had 2.5 hours to present an original take on a classic Châteaubriand, using Montpak veal from Quebec.

The esteemed judges, Chef **Alvin Leung**, Chef **Alex Chen**, Chef **Jason Bangerter**, **Rebecca MacKenzie**, **Thomas Delannoy** and Team Canada's most recent representative Chef **Samuel Sirois** evaluated the competitors' techniques, presentation and, most importantly, their creativity. Hosted by **Mijune Pak**, the match-up was a dramatic display of rare skill and artistry.

Chef **Keith Pears**, currently Executive Chef at W Hotel Toronto, was selected as Canada's next culinary athlete. His first priority will be to work with Chefs Canada to form his team, which will include both a coach and a commis. Chef Pears and his team will perfect their dishes and compete at the Americas semi-final in 2024, in order to move on to Lyon in 2025.

After a 15-year absence, Team Canada made a dramatic comeback at the World Pastry Cup in January 2023, coming in 10th and winning the award for eco-sustainability. A biennial global competition highlighting every aspect of the dessert industry from ice cream to chocolate making, the World Pastry Cup is an intense contest for only the most technically adept and wildly creative patissiers.

Hosted by **Maggie Frith**, the World Pastry Cup finals saw contestants completing sev-

eral challenging tasks in a tight time frame, including finishing and presenting identical chocolate entremets, sharing detailed designs for a plated restaurant dessert, and creating sculptures crafted from Valrhona chocolate.

Judges Chef **Nadège Nourian**, Chef **Rodney Alleguede**, Chef **Stéphane Brunelet**, **Anne Le Quéré**, **Thomas Delannoy** and Chef **Daniel Garcia**, who represented Team Canada in 2023, were on hand to evaluate the exquisite display of creative mastery, stellar execution and taste. Chef **Olivier Potier**, of Montreal's Chez Potier and Chef **Christophe Sportellini**, Pastry chef at Nani Nono in Val-des-Monts, were chosen to represent Team Canada in the next World Pastry Cup.



Restaurants Canada Pizza Competition



"Pizza is a canvas that every culture can paint," said **Michael P. Lamarca**, host of Restaurants Canada's inaugural **Pizza Competition** and himself a five-time National Pizza Champion and International Pizza Champion. Pizzaiolos competed for cash prizes and a chance to attend the International Pizza Competition in Las Vegas. Using different techniques, styles and toppings, they worked fast and furiously to create and plate their pies. The competition was perfectly presented by Ardent Mills, Hormel Rosa Grande, and Lactalis Galbani Mozzarella with Restaurants Canada, and supported by the coordinated administrative efforts of Joe and Alison LeRoux.

A complement of 35 competitors took to the stage at the Faema Canada booth, appointed with Moretti Forni ovens, to prepare, bake and present two identical pizzas to a celebrity panel of judges: Chef **Rocco Agostino**, Executive Chef and partner at the Libretto Group; Chef **Alida Solomon**, owner of Tutti Matti; Italian-born Canadian **Massimo Capra**, restaurant consultant, cookbook author and celebrity chef; and pizza superfan **Scott Wiener**, culinary judge, consultant and pizza journalist.

Salar Madadi from **Maipai Tiki Bar** in Hamilton won the top spot, taking home $5,000, guaranteed entry to next year's International Pizza Challenge at the Pizza Expo in Las Vegas, and a Sunmix dough mixer. Salar, who opened Maipai a mere two months before the pandemic began, is a past winner of the Canadian Pizza Summit. Raman from Hamilton's **Cowabunga Plus** came second, winning $3,000. Representing **Dova Restaurant**, Tomaso took third place and $1,000. **Cowabunga Pizzeria**, sister restaurant to Cowabunga Plus, won pizza equipment for their fourth-place finish.

Twisted Tastes Competition

The Food Truck'N Experience played host to a unique new food competition, sponsored by Kronenbourg 1664 Blanc and Club House for Chefs. Food truck operators were challenged to add a new twist to one of their dishes then pair the result with one of three Kronenbourg 1664 beers: 1664 Blanc, 1664 Lager or 1664 Fruits Rouge. "Our global campaign is 'Elegant moments with a twist'," said Catherine Witkowskyj, brand manager for premium beer with Carlsberg. "This contest was all about good taste with a twist."

Each of the seven competitors were assigned a unique mystery spice the morning of the competition. Judged by food critic and advisor **Mat Beausoleil**, editor of *Foodism* and *Escapism* **Katie Bridges**, and Chef **Juriaan Snellen**, Executive Corporate Chef at McCormick Canada, the food truck operators were evaluated on the success of both the dish itself and how it paired with the selected beverage.

After careful consideration of taste, pairing, and adherence to the theme, the judges awarded a $1,000 prize for each of the three brews. **Haines Jones**, owner and operator of **6 Spice Rack** food truck, took first place in all three categories. Jones' secret ingredient was French's Mustard, and the judges praised him both for the twist it added to his fusion dishes and for how well he paired his creations to the beers.



There was also a fan-favourite award, voted on by visitors to the booth. **Ivan Rude** of the Asian-inspired, Canadian made **North Corner** truck won the $2,000 People's Choice award for Twisted Chef. "It was the first time Kronenberg had sponsored such an event," said Witkowskyj, "But hopefully not the last."

National Barista Championship Qualifiers

Passionate and talented coffee connoisseurs took to the Coffee Stage for the National Barista Championship Qualifier. Each contestant prepared an espresso, milk and signature drink course for a suite of judges. Sponsored by Dairy Farmers of Canada and the Specialty Coffee Association, the competition demonstrated the depth of skill, technique and innovation baristas bring to their craft.

With technical judges observing machine processes and sensory judges examining style, competitors were assessed on cleanliness, creativity, taste, technique and overall presen-

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tation. Each barista had 15 minutes to prepare and serve their three courses to four tasting judges, for a total of 12 drinks.

With backing soundtracks and eloquent presentations, each barista took the audience on a coffee journey, describing their coffee's provenance from bean to cup, showcasing their incredible knowledge and creativity while emphasizing the community, diversity and transparency of the coffee industry as a whole.

Conor Conway, from Epoch Chemistry Coffee House in Toronto, took first place. Conor and the next top four finishers – **Celeste Fiallos** (Omnia Coffee Roasters), **Jair Garduno** (Balam Coffee Project), **Katie Taylor** (Eight Ounce Coffee), **Michael-Phillip Boggia** (Jungle Coffee Roasters) – will progress to the National Barista Championship finals. The winner there will be named Canadian Barista Champion and represent Canada in Athens at the World Barista Championship, June 22-24, 2023.









Beyond the Rail Cocktail Competition



Presented by Beam Suntory, the Beyond the Rail Cocktail competition, hosted by **Christina Veira**, and **Evelyn Chick**, was a celebration of creativity, skill and good old-fashioned teamwork. Entrants worked in pairs to take judges on a sensory journey while delivering a flight of three cocktails: one pre-kegged, one low-ABV, and a wildcard cocktail with an ingredient selected and procured from the Show floor scant hours earlier. Team members were not required to come from the same workplace, and in fact, many did not.

The kegged cocktail was a new challenge this year, and gave competitors a chance to scale up their ideas and the audience a chance to partake. Esteemed judges **Mike McLean**, **Georgia Georgakopoulou**, and **Nick Kennedy** examined the performance, story, technique and teamwork of each competing pair. They commended all the participants for their excellence: judging on a scorecard of 500 points, the difference between the top and bottom finishers was only 20 points.

Alex Lakusta and **Stevie Stewart** won first place, taking home $3,000 for their trio of earth, water and fire cocktails. Last year's winning team of **Sally Gillespie** and **Monique Godhino** (aka Sals and Mo) came in second, winning $1,500 and also the People's Choice award for their progression of Spring beverages. The third-place prize of $500 went to **Liam McKinnon** and **Sebastien Lagrange** for their music-themed creations.

Sommelier Service Competition



The third annual Sommelier Service Competition, hosted by **James Peden** and presented by the Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers (CAPS), Piper-Heidsieck, Charles Heidsieck and Breakthru Beverage, took place on the Bar and Beverage Stage. After advancing through an earlier written exam, the talented finalists served a full champagne course to judges **James Treadwell**, **José Luis Fernandez** and **Nabilah Rawji**.

The competition is designed to challenge entrants' comprehensive expertise, custom-

er engagement and practical skills, as they deliver elevated service while sharing their impressive encyclopedic information. Each contestant gave an exceptional demonstration of both service excellence, sensory skill and archival knowledge as the judges posed questions covering pairings, terminology, terroir and worldwide wineries while the sommeliers poured and placed.

First-place went to **Justin Madol**. The sommelier at Michelin-starred Don Alfonso 1890 Toronto won an all-expenses paid, luxury trip to visit the famed Piper-Heidsieck and Charles Heidsieck estates in Champagne, France. **Nathan Hooper**, also from Don Alfonso 1890, took second place, and **Christian Hamel** of Toronto's Pompette restaurant finished third.

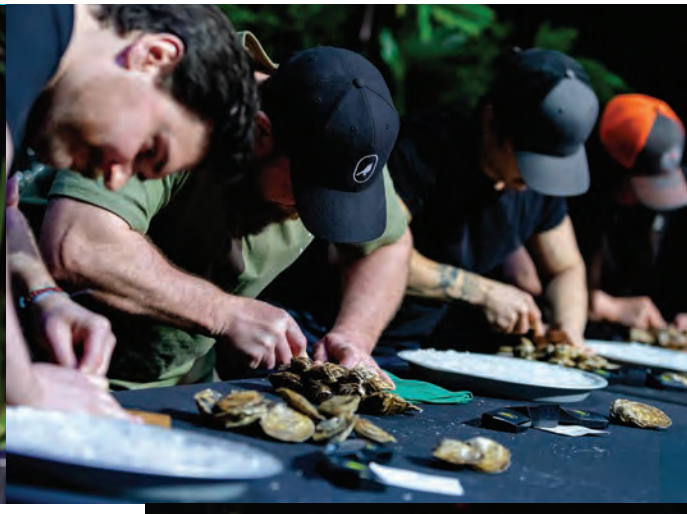


John Bil Oyster Shucking Competition

Presented by Scout and Raspberry Point Oysters, the 4th annual John Bil Oyster Shucking contest was conceived by Chef Charlotte Langley in honour of John Bil and Brett Diederichs, longtime and much-missed friends of the Canadian shucking community. Frantically fast-paced and fun, the finals had competitors racing both each other and the clock to open, clean and present their oysters.

This year saw the introduction of touch-based timing technology, which allowed each competitor to test during the preliminary rounds. The original 40 entrants were whittled down to 12 over the course of the day, and the finalists took to the Bar and Beverage Stage in three heats of four.





Hosted by World Champion shucker **Patrick McMurray** ("Shucker Paddy") and Chef **Charlotte Langley**, participants were judged on both speed and presentation. Each shucker was given 14 oysters, 12 of which they plated for the judges. Judges checked that the bottom of each oyster was cleanly severed, that shells were unbroken and the oysters were grit-free. "They're looking for the perfect combination of fast and clean," said Shucker Paddy.

Eamon Clark from Rodney's Oyster House, many-time winner of the Canadian Oyster Shucking Championships, won the top prize of $1,000, along with an additional $100 award for the judge-voted 'Cleanest Plate'. **Chris Mannochio**, also from Rodney's, took the $500 second prize, and **John DeJong** earned third-place honours and $250.





RC Show Restaurants Canada TORONTO

RC SHOW 2024: SAVE THE DATE

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BEST OF RC SHOW 2023:

MENU'S TOP INNOVATION & REVENUE GENERATION PICKS

With over 1,000 booths packed onto the tradeshow floor, the latest technologies, products, equipment and revenue-generating solutions for foodservice were on display at RC Show. While this list represents some of our favourites, there's no replacement for attending RC Show in person to taste, smell and test-drive the products, brands and services you need to level up your business.



1. ACADIAN STURGEON & CAVIAR

Sustainably-raised Canadian sturgeon caviar and products.

Acadian Caviar has proven that Canadian sturgeon caviar ranks among the world's best-known types of caviar (beluga, ossetra and sevruga), and can be sustainably produced without over-harvesting or damaging the environment. They use pristine Canadian water with native sturgeon species and sell live sturgeon, caviar, and sturgeon meat and products all over the world. Intrigued? Sign up for one of their tasting and educational experiences in Carter's Point, Nova Scotia.

Why we love it: They are Ocean Wise Life certified—not to mention that their caviar is outstanding.

Learn more at: acadian-sturgeon.com | @kingofcaviar

2. REJUVENATE BY PLANTAFORM

The future of indoor gardening from Canadian ag-tech innovators.

Elegant and easy to use, Rejuvenate by Plantaform is the world's first smart indoor garden using advanced Fogponics, NASA's latest agricultural technology. You can grow fresh herbs, vegetables and edible flowers all year round with this showstopping, Canadian-made indoor garden available in midnight black or frost white.

Why we love it: The sleek, space age design of Rejuvenate is the perfect example of form and function and brings agriculture right into the restaurant space.

Learn more at: plantaform.com | @plantaform

PLANTAFORM



Vanilla & Spice

AUTHENTIC FROM MADAGASCAR



3. VANILLA & SPICE

Premium quality vanilla beans from Madagascar.

Born in Madagascar, childhood friends and Vanilla & Spice co-founders Nomena and Aina are intent on supplying Canadians with the highest quality vanilla beans and vanilla products. Highly sought-after, bourbon vanilla beans from Madagascar feature a rich and creamy flavour with a sweet and buttery aroma and are well suited for many baking recipes and desserts. Their vanilla is sourced directly from small, local producers in Madagascar and then handcrafted into premium products in Toronto, Ontario. Wholesale offerings for foodservice available.

Why we love it: Vanilla & Spice offers wholesale pricing for foodservice and their pure vanilla extract is, in our opinion, unequaled.

Learn more at: vanillaandspice.ca | @vanillaandspicecanada | e: info@vanillaandspice.ca



4. HOPE AND SESAME

The first commercially available and certified sustainable sesame milk.

The Planting Hope Company is a woman-led and managed company known for crafting popular, sustainable plant-based products like RightRice, Mosaics veggie chips and Veggicopia snacks. Their latest offering, Hope and Sesame sesame milk, is made using the nutrient-dense pulp left over from the sesame oil industry. Upcycled Certified™ and packed with nutrients, this toasty and delicious sesame milk is available in chilled and shelf-stable formats and comes in six flavours including their breakthrough Barista Blend!

Why we love it: It's not only sustainably made, it's completely delicious.

Learn more at: plantinghopebrands.com | @hopeandsesameco

5. BARBET SPARKLING WATER

Canadian-made, elevated sparkling water for the 0% ABV crowd.

Barbet was started by co-founders Andrea Grand and Katie Fielding to explore the potential of creating an inspired range of non-alcoholic beverages with the same moxy and sparkle as alcoholic drinks. The beautifully-designed cans scream fun (and premium) and contain unique, stand-out flavours including Love Bite (pink grapefruit, ginger and juniper), Wild Card (blood orange, calamansi and a "flicker" of hot jalapeno pepper), and Light Wave (cucumber, pineapple and lavender).

Why we love it: It's a no/lo mixologist's dream that slaps right out of the can.

Learn more at: drinkbarbet.com | @drinkbarbet





6. FOGHAT COCKTAIL SMOKER™ (from Cuisivin)

Showstopping cocktail smoker to level up your bar experience.

Hand-turned from a solid piece of white oak, the Foghat cocktail smoker is designed to perch on a rocks glass or snifter. Bartenders simply add flavoured natural smoking fuel to the smoker to create an aromatic, cascading waterfall of culinary smoke to enhance the flavour of their cocktail or spirit creations. Cuisivin also offers the **Foghat Smoked Cloche Set** *for smoked cheese platters and* **Foghat Smoked Charcuterie Kit** *for next-level boards.*

Why we love it: The bartop presentation premiumizes the cocktail experience and the flavours are clean and complementary.

Learn more at: cuisivin.com

7. CHOPVALUE

A Canadian company that harvests used chopsticks to create beautiful furniture and kitchenware.

ChopValue is the brainchild of Vancouver founder and CEO, Felix Bock. The certified B Corporation urban-harvests used chopsticks and re-engineers them into beautiful custom-designed furniture, flooring, installation walls, coasters and cutting boards engineered for daily use and built to last. The world's first circular economy franchise, ChopValue has harvested over 100 million chopsticks for reuse in products expertly handcrafted in their microfactories for a minimal carbon footprint.

Why we love it: ChopValue offers a b2b design program for restaurants and other business and shows what design thinking can do to solve some of the industry's toughest sustainability challenges.

Learn more at: chopvalue.com | @chopvalue | contact: scott_torontoeast@chopvalue.com

CHOP VALUE





8. YO-YO COOKIES

Iconic cookie from New Zealand and Australia perfected for the Canadian market by two PEI-based ex-pats.

Yo-Yo Cookies are as iconic in Australia and New Zealand as s'mores are to Canadians. Brought to the Maritimes by two New Zealanders who have been making them in their restaurants for 17 years, these delicious butter shortbread sandwich cookies are filled with all-butter buttercream in six flavours: original vanilla, salted caramel, red velvet lusciousness, espresso pumpkin spice, oh my chocolate and zesty lemon. Available in bags or in two-cookie packages.

Why we love them: With 100% real Canadian butter as the second ingredient, these cookies are an easy and unique dessert menu or welcome offering.

Learn more at: yoyocookies.ca | @yoyo.cookies.canada

9. PURA VIDA BIOPLASTICS STRAWS

Bio-based, compostable and reusable drinking straws.

Stronger than conventional single-use plastic straws, Pura Vida straws are made from a bio-plastic compound created from non-GMO cereal flour (maize) and biodegradable polymers. They are home or restaurant compostable, breaking down at about the same rate as other food or yard waste into a nutrient rich humus that can be used as natural fertilizer. Cherokee Nation-owned, Pura Vida is also invested in educating consumers on the harm plastics cause to the terrestrial and marine environment and wildlife.

Why we love them: Pura Vida straws provide a next-generation sustainable, reusable, bio-based solution that stands up to both hot and cold serves.

Learn more at: puravidabioplastics.com | @puravidabioplastics



10. BOTRISTA (from Kevito Group)

Automated, turnkey craft beverage program that minimizes overhead to optimize profitability.



Botrista is a sleek, elevated solution for operators interested in offering a premium craft beverage menu without the operational and labour costs of a full bar program. Their DrinkBot automates the dispensing and mixing of ingredients to deliver high-quality, customized craft drinks in just 10 seconds from order to pour. Botrista's vast library of craft drink options includes infused teas, lattes, iced coffees, lemonades, sparklings, mocktails and more.

Why we love it: Botrista automates the creation of elevated seasonal menus from a tiny, five-square-foot footprint!

Learn more at: botrista.ca | @botrista_bev | contact: sales@kevitogroup.com

11. ECO GUARDIAN SINGLE-USE PLASTIC SOLUTIONS FOR FOODSERVICE

Fibre-based foodservice packaging and plant-based cutlery options.

Eco Guardian has won many awards for their groundbreaking sustainability innovation, including Sobeys Plastic Waste Challenge. They offer a complete line of compostable, fibre-based takeout containers, dinnerware and trays, compostable PLA cups, and plant-based cutlery that can help operators address the upcoming single-use plastics ban in style.

Why we love it: Eco Guardian products replace plastic with sustainable, compostable materials that also meet the demands of form and function, from sushi to burgers.

Learn more at: ecoguardian.com | @ecoguardianinc





12. SPATULA FOODS

Flash-frozen, chef-created meal kits delivered across Ontario.

SPATULA delivers fully-prepped, flash-frozen dishes to consumers from their growing roster of culinary creators. Dishes are cooked to 90% readiness, then flash frozen to lock in nutrients, flavour and quality for customers to simply heat and eat. Restaurants and foodservice operators can apply to retail SPATULA frozen dishes or join the company as affiliates or chef partners.

Why we love it: SPATULA was co-founded by Chef Wallace Wong and Ian Weng, former strategic lead at Uber Eats Canada, and features dishes created by notable chefs and restaurants that receive royalties on each signature SPATULA dish ordered.

Learn more at: spatulafoods.com | @spatulafoods

13. PUDGYBOY'S MINI DONUTS

Donuts on demand for up to 300% profit (based on SRP).

Pudgyboy's mini donuts are not only delicious, they're a brand with major appeal, excellent profitability and comprehensive marketing collateral support. The company's foodservice program is geared to meet operator needs, with donuts shipped frozen for fast service on-demand—just air fry, deep fry or oven-heat them to serve. Available in four signature sugars: Cinnamon sugar, Oreo sugar, Icing sugar, and Frootloops sugar.

Why we love it: The heat-and-eat format reduces labour and waste while increasing revenue.

Learn more about Pudgyboys at: pudgyboys.com | @pudgyboys





14. CARDINAL FIRECOOKER

The world's first mobile BBQ-Smoker-Grill-Open-Pit-Oven on wheels.

The Cardinal Firecooker was created by Canadian pitmaster Marc Cardinali, founder of the popular Cluck & Squeal line of barbecue rubs and blends. The firecooker is the world's first multifunctional, hybrid, offset on-demand cooker boasting 1,772 square inches of cooking area. You can even "Pit Your Ride" with a trailer package with a road-class chassis and trailer abilities.

Why we love it: It's a great option for patios, events or to take your cuisine on the road.

Learn more at: cardinalfirecooker.com | Contact: info@cardinalfirecooker.com

15. OMNI FOOD EQUIPMENT

Unique single-unit revenue generators and restaurant experience enhancers.

OMNI retails a wide range of foodservice equipment including all-in-one, compact units that can add profitable new menu options for operators. Their gelato machine can create 14 litres of gelato per hour with gelato classico, semi-soft ice cream, granita and shock freezing production programs.

Why we love it: OMNI also provides the state-of-the-art Tempesta barista machines used for the World Barista Competition and other affordable, small-footprint revenue solutions!

Learn more at: omnifoodequipment.com | @omnifoodequipment

OMNI Food Equipment





THE STAYING POWER OF INTEGRATED EXPERIENCES

Sports partnerships and tabletop technologies are increasing cheque size and building loyalty for bars and restaurants.

Over the course of a year, an individual may visit restaurants for convenience, celebration or to find community. Of the many reasons consumers patronize one establishment over another, the greatest opportunity for growth may lie in their desire to find community and engage in shared experiences. Consumer tastes may be fickle—feeling burgers on Tuesday and sushi on Saturday—but their craving for shared, emotional experiences has the ingredients to increase spend and visit frequency and build loyalty.

The positive relationship between sports experiences and restaurants has long been recognized and enshrined in familiar and hybrid formats: the local pub, the sports bar, the full-service-restaurant-sports-bar. Food and drink remain central aspects of the restaurant and bar offering, but the importance of the experience itself is rising to the top of the consumer value array and operators and brands are collaborating to find new ways to refresh and expand on the sports experience in bars and restaurants.

The team at Molson Coors has long doubled down on sports, favouring a fan-side brand position. The connection between their products and sports spectatorship and cultural events has long been established and they continue to offer and grow creative and exclusive partnerships and on-premise programs for restaurants. “In terms of restaurant experience, our sales team leads these conversations and support,” says Sophia Lal, Sr. Manager, Molson TM and Miller Lite. “We know our brands can be additive to that “special” restaurant experience—whether that’s unique pouring and serving rituals like a perfect Blue Moon pint served with an Orange wheel, embracing partnerships and promotions like NHL teams with Molson or F1 racing with Heineken, or specific brand activations like Movember and Hop Valley IPA, or Pride Month and Vizzy Hard Seltzer.”

Jeff Weber, Sr. Manager Strategy and Execution at Molson Coors, is a big believer in the value of sports programs for restaurants. “Restaurants are a key avenue for us to be able to reach sports fans in the moment it matters, and where we can craft experiences (prizing, giveaways, watching rituals) that can improve the consumer experience that is both reflective of our brands and the restaurant. It’s always been a key part of our strategy and will continue to be!” He points out that Molson Coors brands benefit from exposure and adjacency through sponsoring special programs and events, which in turn increase the time consumers spend in the location and the opportunity restaurants have to offer special menu items and promotions.

“We know the value of sports as a passion for consumers and getting close to the consumer on how they’re watching and their rituals is our focus,” Lal says. “We have seen venue sales increase as much as +40 per cent when the local hometown team is on a winning streak or extends their season by an additional game or round. Establishments that build strategies and activations to piggy-back on the local excitement are bound to reap major benefits! We saw some great consumer engagement in our recent Boston Pizza “Call The Shot” program (www.calltheshot.ca) that ran through the recent NHL playoffs. Looking forward to 2024, we will be looking to bring similar exciting activations to life with other outlets across Canada.”

Molson Coors is also looking for ways to repeat its success with powerful digital experiences. “In the coming months, we will

be expanding our digital solutions toolkits, so restaurant/bar/pub patrons can enjoy engaging digital experiences that entice them to stay for the entire game," Lal shares. "Promotions and activations won't just be limited to the sports world though, they could also relate to local music events, venue celebrations, or brand specific engagement activations."

The Molson Coors team encourages Canadian operators to take a look at the brand's partnerships and explore their potential to add value to their customers. "We have some amazing small, medium, and large scale partnerships across Canada, and we love nothing more than when local restaurant, pub or bar partners hop on board and bring relevant promotions and activations to life," says Weber. "Stay tuned for exciting promotions and activations for the 2023/24 hockey and football season and more!

As Molson Coors innovates to engage consumers emotionally, the Canadian tech company Oongalee is enhancing consumer engagement through exclusive streaming and advertising promotion on their tabletop devices, and their robust Oongalee Interactive Restaurant Assistant. "I feel that we're the centre point that connects sports and restaurants," says Amrit Sagoo, Oongalee founder and CEO. "Our technology sits on every restaurant table, and we can deliver sports broadcasting and even betting based on the consumer's interest, which makes their experience better. We can also use the technology so that, for example, The Toronto



Blue Jays can interact with fans in Vancouver, Edmonton or Calgary. We can really push a unified brand experience."

Oongalee's tabletop device features a high-resolution screen that streams Rogers-represented ads along with restaurant menus and specials. It also doubles as a device charger. Custom, real-time restaurant menus and promotions can even be uploaded to consumer devices via QR code. With the Oongalee Interactive Restaurant Assistant service (available for an additional fee), guests can use the "Excuse me" feature to notify their server they are ready to order, or would like to order another round or the bill request feature when they're ready to settle up. The unique "Happy Hour Countdown" feature increases engagement with time-based promotions and specials driving incremental revenue.

The company's devices are in place in over 7,000 screens across Canada including Denny's, The Canadian Brewhouse and Boston Pizza. "At Boston Pizza and Denny's, we've seen up to 13 per cent increase on bill spend and the story is even bigger for desserts," says Sagoo. "Some of the Boston Pizza locations have seen a 600 per cent increase on dessert sales. We were expecting an increase, but 600 per cent is massive. Integrating eye-catching visuals has helped increase sales and promotions servers might miss or that can't be captured by a tent card. Now restaurants can use real time, unlimited creativity with their own menu items and add on cool sports activations and promotions while saving on print and operations costs.

Sagoo is excited about Oongalee's new partnership with Rogers Sports & Media to bring live sports engagement opportunities to restaurant tables, from enhanced fan experiences to live game streaming to integrated sports betting and custom brand offers. "We're in the restaurants and bars where people are going to watch sports, and we can help bring some of those arena environments into the on premise," Sagoo points out. "For example, every time the Blue Jays hit a home run, all our screens on every single table, in every sports bar across Canada, start lighting up. Now that sports betting is a big thing, Oongalee enables betting companies to partner with restaurants and bars, which increases engagement and cheque spend. We find ways to personalize the experience and engage the customer. We're on every table and that space is very intimate."

Oongalee screens also offer opportunities for real-time brand integration and co-branded promotions Sargoo says. "A company like Molson Coors has an array of different products from beers to seltzers. They can display and promote these products on the tabletop instead of producing expensive coasters. Now, you're not only streaming the game, you're able to watch it with a big, juicy burger in your hand and promote bar and menu offerings or to new products. We're the gateway between all partners."



To learn more about Molson Coors sports programs for restaurants, contact your local rep.

Learn more about Oongalee's solutions for restaurants at: oongalee.com

HEART&HUSTLE

Meet RC Show 2023's All-Star Volunteers

10 of RC Show 2023's top volunteers share their path to RC Show and top moments at the heart of the hustle.



BY CHRIS SZEGO

From April 10-12 2023, the RC Show welcomed hundreds of volunteers who worked more than 1800 hours over the three jam-packed days of the Show. Many were students, gaining valuable hands-on experience while supporting the success of Canada's leading Hospitality & Foodservice Expo. Their hard work behind the scenes made the RC Show possible.

"The purpose of the RC Show Volunteer Program is to create a safe environment for students to gain the confidence they need to be successful in the hospitality workforce," said Melanie Retz, Registration and Events Manager. Retz also coordinated the volunteers. "It is with great pleasure that we see many of our students successfully gain employment in our industry through the connections they made while volunteering at RC Show."

With support from Centennial College, Freehouse Collective, Push Operations, Jastex, Restaurant Leadership 101, and many of the Restaurants Canada Board members, the volunteers, who covered 420 shifts on stages and behind the scenes, in the VIP room, and all across the RC Show, had the opportunity to hone their skills, network with industry professionals and join a community of like-minded future leaders.

Restaurants Canada selected 10 volunteers who exemplify heart and hustle, and whose dedication, hard work, and innovative approach capture what makes the RC Show – and the foodservice industry in general – so wonderful.



Santosh Acharya is studying post-graduate Event Management at Centennial College. Passionate about learning and expanding his knowledge in foodservice, he heard about volunteer opportunities at the RC Show through his program coordinator and was immediately drawn to the chance to gain hands-on experience.

"Foodservice has lots of opportunities for those who are passionate about hospitality." Santosh sees it as an emerging industry, with room for all kinds of exciting events. "The ability to create memorable experiences through food and hospitality is what drew me to my field of study. I am particularly interested in the concept of sustainable food service and the use of local ingredients. I would like to see more emphasis on sustainable practices and responsible sourcing in the foodservice industry."

Santosh found the RC Show provided an incredible opportunity to gain hands-on experience and learn from industry experts. "As a volunteer, I was able to work alongside industry professionals and learn about the latest trends and technologies. I was particularly impressed by the variety of exhibitors and the breadth of knowledge available at the show. One of the biggest surprises for me was the level of organization and planning that went into the event. It was inspiring to see so many passionate people come together to make the RC Show a success."



Geraldine Artillaga is a TV and Live Events Producer from the Philippines who recently relocated to Canada. Pursuing Culinary Management Studies at Conestoga College, she also works at Wildcraft Grill + Long Bar. 2023 was her second year of volunteering: she first learned about the event through Chef Philippe Saraiva. "I am grateful for his support and commitment to education, and promoting the growth and development of culinary enthusiasts".

Geraldine's love for cooking drew her to the field. "Chef Craig Gilbertson's unwavering dedication inspired me to persist despite the challenges I faced after losing my sense of taste due to COVID." She is enamored with every aspect of the industry, from building relationships with fellow chefs to gaining valuable experience working in different kitchens. However, she believes the industry can still improve in terms of gender equality. "As a woman in the culinary field, I hope to contribute to increasing the representation of women in commercial kitchens, not just as talented chefs, but also in leadership and management roles."

"The RC Show is a remarkable tribute to the exceptional talents and achievements of chefs, restaurants, and organizations in the culinary and hospitality industries." Geraldine particularly appreciated the Bocuse d'Or selection and Garland competition. "It was such an impressive display of culinary expertise and ingenuity by esteemed chefs, in the presence of distinguished and globally renowned judges. The talks and workshops from those judges were an added benefit. They generously shared their knowledge and ideas with the attendees."



Melanie Cameron is a mom, a student, an entrepreneur, and food industry enthusiast. Currently wrapping up her final online semester of Baking and Pastry Arts Management at Centennial College, she secured a position at De La Terre Bakery and Café after her in-person work placement. Melanie volunteered at the RC Show 2022 and was thrilled to return.

"I love the versatility of the industry and the passion that we, foodservice professionals, bring to our roles. Creativity and innovation are at the heart of the industry and enable for an ever-changing opportunity to learn and evolve." Melanie has been encouraged to see more women excelling in the industry, and appreciates how local bakeries, restaurants, and foodservice establishments are opting to provide their day's "spoils" to local food banks and shelters.

"I was beyond thrilled that they had a "pastry day" at the culinary stage. Working behind the scenes of the culinary stage was the highlight of my experience." Melanie was particularly delighted to perform the task of



Chef Assistant in the Garland competition. "The four competitors were incredibly kind and down to earth and they took the time to get to know us volunteers, all while sharing their experiences and passion. I must commend the Restaurants Canada team for their care of us volunteers and their skilled preparations."



Sergii Daragn's journey in the hospitality industry started when he worked at a bar in Ukraine as a university student. He fell in love with the industry and realized this was what he wanted to do. "I came to Canada to finish my education in marketing and continued studying wines and spirits. I thought that in this way I could use my passion, skills, and knowledge to bring something new, inspire more people by promoting incredible things, and keep developing the hospitality industry."

Sergii visited the RC Show last year and was astonished. "My first thought was, 'I want to see how Restaurants Canada is organizing everything and help them." He connected with a Restaurants Canada representative through

the non-profit organization Les Dames d'Escoffier Ontario. "I shared with her my passion and asked if there was any chance to work at the RC Show. It was one of my dreams, to be a part of such a huge event, and it came true!"

Foodservice and hospitality are Sergii's driving passions. "What I like the most about the industry is that it is like a big family where everyone is sharing happiness, and fun." His goal is to bring something new to the industry through food, drinks, and events. "Hopefully, in the future, I will have a chance to bring collaboration between the wine & spirits and food industries to an even higher level and find even more opportunities to create something incredible together."



Mikhaela De Castro studied Resort Service and Hotel Operations Management at Fanshawe College. Presently, she works as a restaurant manager. "I'm always interested in learning new things and looking for volunteer opportunities that can help me progress in my job and broaden my expertise - that's what led me to the RC Show."

"When I arrived in Canada, I found my first job in the foodservice sector. It makes sense that a student should be able to find employment and support herself." Mikhaela finds the foodservice industry exciting and challenging. "Though it may seem simple to some, it takes time and effort to be successful. The field constantly has fresh developments, and it can be difficult to keep up."

Mikhaela found volunteering at the RC Show a highly educational and distinctive experience. So many people were involved and there were so many moving parts that came together to make an unforgettable experience. "The RC Show's greatest highlights are how well everyone gets along with one another, and how much they care about the business they work for. Because the RC Show is new every year and has more wisdom and expertise for everyone who goes, I am always surprised and learning new things."



Sahil Devgan is from Punjab, India, and has a Bachelor's in Hotel Management and Catering Technology from Lovely Professional University and a postgraduate Certificate in Hotel Resort and Restaurant Management from Centennial College. He has worked in the hospitality industry for three years, specializing in the Food and Beverage Department. "I discovered the Restaurants Canada Show last year while studying at Centennial College and decided to volunteer. It was an excellent networking opportunity, as well as the opportunity to view the work before the event."

Volunteering at the show was thrilling for Sahil. "It was one of the most enjoyable experiences I've ever had. I was so delighted to see nearly every brand under one roof, and was astounded by the modern technology used in the food and beverage business." He was particularly interested in the growing inclusion of plant-based cuisine. The cooking competitions were a pleasant surprise. "It was great to see chefs with so many abilities and skills. Particularly watching them make a chocolate masterpiece."

"I am really interested in assisting people and transforming their moments into memories." Aside from that, Sahil volunteered because he is interested in learning more about alcohol and food service. "The most satisfying component of food and beverage service is introducing customers to menu items, and making suggestions depending on the guests' likes, ensuring they feel like they get value for their money." He's interested to see how the foodservice industry adapts the traditional approach to remuneration. "I believe that everyone gives their all in their respective professions and that a reward program should be established in hospitality businesses."



Analiza Indiongco is a culinary student at Centennial College who is currently working at Oliver and Bonacini at Adelaide Toronto Board of Trust. She started there during her work-integrated learning segment and was hired on permanently afterwards. "I learned about the chance to volunteer at the RC Show from our school, and immediately emailed the organizer saying that I wanted to volunteer".

In her home country, the Philippines, Analiza owned a food business for 10 years. "I came here to Canada to enhance my knowledge in the food industry. I like cooking and love food, and I am passionate to learn more about diverse kinds of dishes and food cultures. I like serving people and seeing them happy."

Analiza enjoyed the chance to assist during the culinary competitions. "It was really a nerve-wracking experience. The stage is on fire, and it made me feel like I'm also one of the big Chefs competing. All the competitors did excellently – they had such talent!" The chance for a student like herself to have such a successful engagement with a new Chef was both enjoyable and a once in a lifetime opportunity. "Volunteering is a great way to communicate with different people and make connections in different industries."





Kevin Macwan is an international student from India who completed the culinary program at Centennial College and is currently working as a Chef at Dova Restaurant. He heard about the RC Show from one of his mentors, who explained about the opportunity to volunteer and gain experience in the culinary world.

"When I first arrived in 2021, I was a medical student at Seneca. But after completing my program I was not enjoying it at all. Apart from that, I was also deeply interested in the culinary field. My sister helped me to get into culinary school and that's where my journey as a chef started. I like how you put all your emotions into creating and cooking all types of dishes, and putting smiles on people's faces."

"Volunteering at the RC Show was a blast!" Kevin's chief highlight? Assisting Chef Shai-Ann Tyson, winner of the exciting Garland Canada Culinary competition, on stage. "The most shocking and surprising part for me was the chance to meet my idols like Chef Alvin Leung, Chef Eric Chong from *MasterChef Canada*, and oyster shucking champion Patrick McMurray." In future, Kevin would like to see more competitions in culinary schools. "That will help to boost confidence which is an important part of a chef's life."



Emily Ramos is currently a 1st-year Culinary Management student at Conestoga College, who has worked in the food industry since she was 15. After hearing about the chance to volunteer at the RC Show through Chef Philippe Saravia, she made a last-minute decision to attend, but volunteer applications had closed. So, she reached out via Instagram, got in touch with Melanie Retz, who then helped her join as a volunteer.

"MasterChef Canada drew me into the field when I was younger. It was so interesting to see how complex and challenging food can be, how there were a lot more elements in play than I thought". Learning more about food is what keeps Emily going. "I want to learn what goes into a plate. I want to hear the stories behind the dish from start to finish, listen to the chefs and their love of food and absorb that knowledge. That's what I love about this industry." She appreciated the opportunity to try so many great tastes at the RC Show, "especially the food truck with the churros. Being able to meet Wallace Wong – who is one of the chefs who inspires me in this field – was inspiring. Watching the Bocuse d'Or National selection and the World Pastry Cup National selections, I was surprised and impressed with how intricate and attentive the contestants were".

The RC Show showed Emily that the foodservice industry is full of things to discover and talk about: good people and places, and more complex issues. "I'd like to see more balanced lives for chefs. We're under so much pressure that mental health and well-being become the least of our priorities. I respect the heart and hustle, but, if that principle doesn't apply to ourselves, I believe it will reflect the dish."



Suyash Shetty is from Mumbai, India, the City of Lights. With undergraduate credentials in Hospitality and Tourism Management, he has also completed Global Hospitality and Business Development studies at Seneca College. Currently, he's pursuing a degree in Event Management at Centennial College.

"I have a passion for cooking and enjoy the creative process of developing new dishes. I am also very interested in the business side of the industry, the management of finances and operations." He learned about the RC Show at Centennial College, and was eager to volunteer. "I want to stay up to date with the latest technologies and innovations to remain competitive and meet customer demands."

Suyash worked with the Marriott Group of Hotels in India, spending time in each core department. "The RC Show is the biggest event in Canada's foodservice and hospitality industry: attending it as an event management student volunteer was an excellent opportunity to learn about event planning and management firsthand. The RC Show's scale, scope, and complexity were surprising, but it offered valuable lessons on event planning, logistics, marketing, and operations."



RC Show Restaurants Canada ·TORONTO·

Volunteers are extremely important to the success of RC Show.

Restaurants Canada depends on the knowledge and vitality of students in hospitality programs to help elevate the attendees' experience. Volunteering at RC Show provides hands-on learning so that students can form a foundation to build upon as they navigate their career in the hospitality industry. With various roles and responsibilities, volunteers will be immersed in the world of live events and be exposed to the industry like never before.

RC Show 2024 Volunteer Applications:

Volunteer applications open November 2023 for culinary, event and other hospitality students aged 19+.

Applicants can visit the RC Show website: RCShow.com/why-attend/volunteer.com, and apply directly through the website.



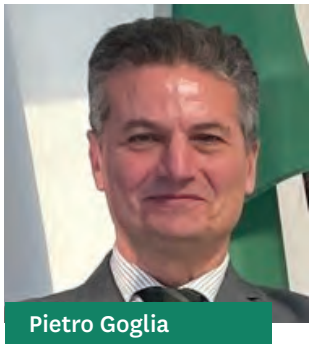
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Chef Alida Solomon *in conversation with* Pietro Goglia, *Vice Director at the* Italian Trade Agency



Pietro Goglia



Chef Alida Solomon

Alida Solomon, *is one of the small (but growing) group of women chef-owners in Canada. Since its opening in 2002, Tutti Matti, her downtown Toronto restaurant devoted to authentic Tuscan cuisine, has been lauded by critics and received both local and international awards, including the prestigious 2009 Leccio D'Oro for Osteria of the Year (an award previously won by Alain Ducasse). Long a passionate advocate for Italian cuisine and a go-to resource for regional ingredients and products, Chef Alida met with Pietro Goglia at RC Show 2023 to talk about the investment Italy is making in the Canadian foodservice market and how chefs and operators can benefit from the distinctive reputation and quality of Italian ingredients, foods and technology.*

PG: ***As Italians, we have always placed the highest value on authentic, natural foods. As a top Canadian chef, why have you placed Italian flavours and ingredients at the heart of your cuisine?***

AS: Using an authentic, quality product—whether it's wine, cheese, flour or oil—makes a massive difference to a dish, and a little bit goes a long way. Better quality, natural products typically last longer. For example, when you make a pizza dough using a natural flour, you don't have to use leavening like yeast because when you age or cure the dough, it creates its own sugar and the dough lasts in the fridge up to five days. Not to mention that it looks gorgeous, because the flour is totally different.

PG: ***Geography is the unmatched characteristic of our outstanding extra virgin olive oil production—part of what makes our products extraordinary is our terroir and our location by the Mediterranean Sea. On the island of Sicily, they've grown olives for thousands of years in an ideal natural climate with hot days, cool evenings and coastal breezes. Everybody uses olive oil, yet few fully understand and appreciate it.***

AS: We have a very North American perception of the consumption of olive oil. At my restaurant, we have 18 different olive oils in circulation—I'm the chef who spends more money on olive oil than anything else. People ask for bread, and restaurants just automatically provide the olive oil. They shouldn't. Olive oil is very expensive, and it changes every year with the growing season. This year, Tuscany lost 60 per cent of its production—it was the longest drought in documented history.

We always use extra virgin olive oil, first press. It's expensive and it's precious. I want people who walk through the door of Tutti Matti to feel like they're actually in Tuscany. You eat by my rules because you came to me to eat something authentic. The care it takes to produce quality olive oil is way more than people think. When you put fresh olive oil in your mouth, it's a physical experience beginning in your mouth and travelling to the back of your head. Olive oil is like wine. It's an investment in your physical person and in flavour. I believe it's our responsibility in the restaurant industry to teach people about appreciation and responsible use.

PG: ***Italy is constantly innovating in food technology, with companies using Italian engineering to perfect frozen food production and cold food storage processes that lock in the authentic flavours and freshness. How can Canadian restaurants use these innovations to save money and enhance their menus with Italian products?***

AS: Many pre-prepared or frozen Italian-made foods can be used ready-made for quick service restaurants or as a beautiful base, like for a pizza bianca or sourdough. These new Italian brands we now have access to in Canada are really great.

PG: ***You are very well respected regionally for your cuisine and your ability to pair food and wine. How did you learn so quickly?***

AS: As a chef, wine and food are equally important. You can't separate them—wine lists and menus are meant to be written together, but in North America, we've separated them. As a very young chef in Montalcino, I had the pleasure of learning about incredible Montepulciano wines. You need to connect with where the food came from and get inspiration from that region's tastes and flavours.



From left to right: *Christian Pritchard, Executive Chef and Culinary Adventurist at Aurora Importing, Marco Saladini, Director at ITA, Massimo Lollo, Export Manager at Polselli, Alida Solomon, Owner and Chef at Tutti Matti, Pietro Goglia, Vice Director at ITA, Riccardo Baldissera, Sales Assistant at Podere Casanova Winery*

If you want to offer the extraordinary, authentic Italian ingredients matter.

Italian products are known for their quality and variety. Each region has specific, sought-after foods from 400 types of cheese, endless varieties of renowned wines and the best olive oil in the world. The Italian Trade Agency invites you to explore just a few of the Made in Italy companies and products available to Canadian foodservice featured in its Pavilion at RC Show 2023.

Antiche Cascine Spa was born over 20 years ago to produce frozen gastronomic specialties, with a focus on **Mediterranean finger and street foods**. Their modern plant is located in Raviscanina, on the edge of the beautiful Matese Regional Park in the province of Caserta. Resolutely focused on food quality, the company collaborates closely with university and research departments and develops proprietary technologies, patents and prototypes to support the ongoing product innovation and eco-sustainable operations they are known for and committed to.

Learn more at: **www.antichecascine.it** | **Antiche Cascine AC Spa** **antichecascine**

The true expression of a forty-year passion for excellence in fish farming, Giaveri Rodolfo **Caviar Giaveri** is synonymous with **extra fine caviar**. Just as the quality of champagne begins in the vineyard, so the wellbeing of sturgeons determines the quality of their caviar, an authentic and genuine part of the Italian gastronomic culture. Years of attention and dedication maintain the equilibrium of the species on their own protected, controlled and sustainable fish farms where they live and mature almost as they would in the wild.

Learn more at: **www.caviargiaveri.com** | **Caviar Giaveri** **caviargiaveri**

The **Frantoi Cutrera** olive mills are located in Chiaramonte Gulfi, a small town in south-eastern Sicily. Cutrera olive oil is made from high quality Sicilian olives and is considered **one of the best extra virgin oils in the world**. Here the olive trees have thrived for thousands of years in their natural habitat with olive cultivation, harvesting and processing techniques rooted in the history of the island. The most famous of all is the EVOO Primo, which in Italian means “first”, and is exported to more than 30 countries worldwide in bottles or cans.

Learn more at: **www.frantoi.org** | **Frantoi Cutrera** **frantoi_cutrera**

FTD SRL is an Italian **leader in storing and distributing quality refrigerated and frozen food products** from ice cream to baked goods and artisanal pasta. Their modern engineering is complemented by Italian creativity to deliver reliable, low-power cold services to customers in over 28 countries.

Learn more at: **www.ftdsrl.it**

Podere Casanova’s fine **Tuscan wines** are a result of the ideal terroir and pedoclimatic environment that characterize their vineyard and favour the formation of polyphenols and anthocyanins on grapes. Their winemaking process balances heritage traditions and sustainable management practices, which has built their global reputation for quality.

Learn more at: **www.poderecasanovavini.com** | **Podere Casanova Montepulciano** **poderecasanovamontepulciano**

Located in Arce, Frosinone, Polselli has grown from a small, artisan flour mill to lead the Italian quality milling sector. Their **fine flour** is the perfect expression of nurturing a sterling production chain, a process with ancient roots that is constantly developing through meticulous research and innovation.

Learn more at: **www.polselli.it** | **Polselli - La Farina Italiana** **polselli.farine**

ITA
ITALIAN TRADE AGENCY
ICE - Italian Trade Commission

The Italian Trade Agency invites you to engage directly with these top Italian brands available to Canadian foodservice or to contact them directly to facilitate direct connections with high-quality Italian farmers, producers and makers.

For more *Made in Italy* food products, please visit: **italianmade.com**
To source and connect with Italian producers and brands, please contact the Italian Trade Agency: **montreal@ice.it**



THE ULTIMATE: *Remembering Peter Oliver*

Peter Oliver, legendary Canadian restaurateur and half of the Oliver & Bonacini (O&B) partnership that accelerated and redefined and reshaped the Canadian hospitality industry, died on September 21, 2022 at the age of 74 after a battle with cancer.

Peter Oliver was posthumously honoured with Restaurants Canada's Legacy Award at RC Show 2023 in April. "So many leaders in our industry started at Oliver & Bonacini and, whether they've moved on to other roles in hospitality or are still with O&B, they carry that experience and impact forward." Kelly Higginson, President and CEO of Restaurants Canada and editor of MENU magazine points out. "His reach is unbelievable. Peter was such a strong force. He pushed people hard and was so deeply dedicated to the highest quality. He understood and valued the details that excellence requires. But he also focused on people and knew how to push them to keep evolving. He created careers in hospitality and saw the value in investing in employee education and other benefits at a time when very few restaurant groups were offering opportunities like that. People grew within O&B because there was stability, and there was investment in them. He was one of the first to make hospitality a robust career option in Canada."

Higginson also notes that Peter Oliver respected vigour in conversation. "He wanted to bring out that emotion in people and relished when people would push back or get angry because he understood what that meant. He wanted people who were passionate about their beliefs and their own vision. He was an excellent brand manager, but he was an outstanding people manager. He scouted and developed talent exceptionally well, and had a great ability to see the spark this business demands in people—sometimes long before they did."

Things have changed so much in this industry over the last three years," Higginson reflects. "I don't know if we're going to ever see another Peter Oliver. There is much we can all learn from Peter and carry forward in our own lives and businesses. That's part of why we felt this collection was important."

Restaurants Canada and Oliver & Bonacini, Peter Oliver's legendary hospitality company, have gathered anecdotes and reflections on his legacy from some of those he knew well, and a few who watched his meteoric rise and transformational effect on the industry from afar. We hope this collection helps preserve some of Peter's ideas about business and life, and maybe even inspires some of the thoughtfulness and creativity he brought to hospitality for the new era of restaurants.

SCOTT BELLHOUSE
Principal, Bellhouse Hospitality Inc.

I worked with Peter for 11 years, from 2000-2011, starting as an assistant manager at Jump. I worked my way up into a director of operations role with the company. I wouldn't have stayed at O&B as long as I did if it wasn't for Peter.

In recruitment, with what I do, I'm at 10,000 feet above the industry, so I see everything from a different purview. I'm 51 years old and I've been doing this my whole life. I would say that in the last 25 years, there's never been an owner that has had as much impact or has been at the forefront of the industry like Peter, period. Such a presence, like a figurehead, a leader... but not just in terms of restaurants. Peter led from a different perspective.
He led from a place of people as opposed to business. He knew how to get the most out of a person. Here's Peter in a nutshell: his businesses could be crumbling around him, and things could be going completely sideways, but he would act like everything was great. He was the essential optimist in a business that can be pretty negative.

I've never had anybody in my life, professional or personally, give me as many opportunities as he did. He pushed me to an unbelievable level. He was like a second father to me. For example, we have twin 13-year-old girls. They were both born very premature. One of my daughters, Maya, ended up at SickKids in Toronto, and she was there for six months. She had three or four brain surgeries because they had to put shunts in her skull, which she'll have forever. Peter came up to the hospital probably six times, like once a month. Just to sit with my wife and me. He didn't have to do that, but that's just who he was.

When I left the company to start my own business, he took me out for lunch. He gave me some advice, but he also gave me some money—he actually helped. He pushed really hard, but he was also a very thoughtful person who put people first. He wasn't perfect—but he had a lot on his plate, balancing time between work and raising money for his foundation, JDRF. I don't know how he did it all. He was just tireless. And I've never met anybody like him. Ever.

One last story I'd like to share... One morning, I was already at the office when Peter came in. I was in the boardroom, and his office is beside the boardroom. He comes in looking to eat this piece of carrot cake in the fridge someone had brought him the day before for breakfast. He opens the fridge, and the cake's not there. Peter's a pretty big, loud guy and he swears and says, "Someone ate my carrot cake!" He starts asking people if they know what happened to his carrot cake and they tell him they don't. Then, he sees me sitting in the boardroom and sits down with me, and he just wants to shoot the breeze. He says, "Hey, how are you doing—what's going on?" And I say, "Oh, I'm great, but I'm really full." He says, "What do you mean you're full? And I'm like, "I just had this really great piece of carrot cake out of the fridge." I was joking, of course, but he looked like a twelve-year-old boy when he responded, "You ate my carrot cake?" I said, "No. I'm just f—-king with you, Peter." And he just started laughing.

You could joke around with him and have a good time—he was an amazing dude—but he could push you. I opened six restaurants for that company. He knew I would do the work because I'm a workhorse, but he trusted me and thought I was competent, or he wouldn't have let me do it. When you didn't think you had anything left to give, he figured out a way to get more out of you, and you wanted to do it for him. Because at the heart of it, you knew he was a good person.

Peter made that company what it was because he hired really good people, and he was able to motivate and retain them. He was the culture piece.

CHEF MICHAEL BONACINI
Co-Founder, Oliver & Bonacini Restaurants

I was fortunate enough to spend 30 years in partnership with Peter. To me, he was more than a business partner — he was a mentor. We shared a similar vision, ideas, and appreciation for the industry. He was a good, loyal, hardworking, no-nonsense individual. The idea of "manners maketh man" was important to us, as was the idea of being gentlemen in business. I recall him saying, "It's not so much how you can outsmart the other guy, it's about meeting in the middle that matters." Having been in the industry a bit longer than I, he would often say, "I've made all the mistakes in the restaurant business so that you don't have to make them." Turns out we still managed to make some mistakes, but we worked through them together, and learned to laugh about them in the end. I recall one time we lost $50,000 backing out of a deal. Peter said, "You know Michael, sometimes the best deals in life are the deals you don't do." That was exactly Peter. He had a way of evaluating a situation, turning negatives into positives, and moving forward.

Right from the start, Peter and I had a strong business connection. The first time we sat down to talk seriously about opening a restaurant together — what was to become Jump Café & Bar — it was clear that we shared the same vision. At that time, circa 1992, there were virtually no fine dining spots in the financial core, and we both wanted to change that. We were also both inspired by a fantastic restaurant in New York City called Union Square Café. We knew what we wanted to

> "Bringing the Oliver & Bonacini values to life is what has made us successful. Peter had the wisdom and vision to understand that. That will be his legacy, not just to O&B, but to anyone who is passionate about what we in hospitality do."
>
> - Chef Michael Bonacini



build. I got excited and he got excited — it felt right. When you have that kind of connection, it's almost soulmate-like. It was a powerful, symbiotic synergy that I don't think happens to many people in business partnerships.

That doesn't mean we didn't have our ups and downs, though they were very few and far between. In fact, when we decided to become business partners, it took us five years to get a partnership document completed. Not because Peter or I were being obstinate or difficult about it, but because we just couldn't be bothered to want to do it. When our lawyers and accountants pushed, we finally got it done and said, "We're going to stick these in the bottom of our drawer at the office and hope to God we never have to take them out." I don't believe we ever had to take them out a single time. I think that's quite a thing to be proud of.

Peter was the kind of guy who would allow you to think big. He encouraged it, actually. He always had big, bold ideas, often rooted in the idea of helping others. He'd come in in the morning and say, "Michael, grab a seat. I need to talk to you." He'd have an idea. One time, he'd seen an ad for a cottage out in Nova Scotia. He thought it would be fantastic to go out and buy this place so that we could send employees who had been with us a long time to relax and enjoy it. We flew out there, rented a car, and when we arrived, it was disastrous, an absolute tear-down. However, in typical Peter form, we made the most of the trip, spending two days exploring the countryside, enjoying East Coast hospitality and talking about life.

Another time, he was concerned about the well-being of a long-time employee, Ashley, who had worked for him since the opening of Oliver's Old Fashioned Bakery and was facing some challenges. In that case, Peter ended up buying a condo for Ashley and his wife to live in. The idea of giving to those within your circle who are less fortunate was so important to Peter. These are the kinds of things that made him who he was. His belief in humanity and in helping one another was incredibly strong. That extended to his home country of South Africa as well. He believed that education was the key, and he eventually devoted himself to building schools there and creating the Get Ahead Program (GAP) through The Leacock Foundation, a charity he founded.

There is no doubt that Peter was a born leader and true visionary. He could suck the air out of a room the moment he walked into it, and we all loved him for that. At our head office, when we'd have a casual employee lunch in the boardroom, he'd get up and talk about how proud he was of everyone, where the company was going, and all that we'd achieved together. To him, the O&B family was such an important part of who we are. Each morning, he made it a point to pick up the phone and have a quick chat with an employee or two. He considered this an essential activity, no matter how busy he was. When he would dine out, he would always go into the kitchen and shake hands with the cooks. It was those kind of touching moments that made him so special. He'd tell the host they were the most important person in the dining room that night. "The welcome you give the guests is going to blow them away when you use their name and let them know you're delighted to have them back with us." That kind of storytelling, commitment, drive, and vision was consistent from day one of the 30 years we were partners. It never varied. That was Peter.

It was Peter who created our handbook, core values, and pushed hard to develop a strong culture. If you look at the word 'culture', the first few letters spell 'cult'. He often referred to wanting to have a cult-like culture at O&B when it came down to food and service. Peter led almost every employee orientation session himself. It was five hours of Peter explaining the company vision and values, and it was the best five hours you'd ever want to have. It would often include a lunch or, more often than not, a dinner. He went through the handbook, read letters from guests, emails from past employees, talked about training, culture, and the philosophy of the company. Occasionally, I'd sit in on these orientations and it would literally make the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. He was so passionate and motivating when he would speak about our food, our service, and the guest experience we were trying to create. He believed that if he could get every employee to buy into the vision of what we were striving to achieve, they would be the ambassadors who would carry us forward, and so they did.

The Oliver & Bonacini handbook took Peter years and years to put together, with the assistance of so many people — myself, general managers, chefs, our Marketing and Communications Director, Theresa. Our handbook is not cast in stone. It changes and evolves, but it is also the foundation of who we are as a food service and hospitality leader. I've had people in industry tell me, "Oh, I have one of your Oliver & Bonacini handbooks." I'd say, "Great. I hope it comes in handy for you." It's not the fact you have the book but that you put it to use every single day that makes the difference. It really does. Bringing the Oliver & Bonacini values to life is what has made us successful. Peter had the wisdom



and vision to understand that. That will be his legacy, not just to O&B, but to anyone who is passionate about what we in hospitality do.

CYRUS COOPER
Professor and Program Coordinator at The School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts at Centennial College

A snapshot of how Peter Oliver inspired individuals to realize their potential before they knew they could:

"You'll be running our restaurants one day, Cyrus." This was the message Peter Oliver hand wrote on my personal holiday card one year in 2008. I have this framed and in my office to this day. He hand wrote all the employee cards along with Michael Bonacini for many years.

Before I joined the world of academia I had the privilege of working at Oliver & Bonacini Hospitality for ten years. I was discovered by Michael Bonacini who agreed to take a meeting with me at his office in 2005. I joined Auberge du Pommier as a Server Assistant and worked my way through the company's rigorous training and leadership milestones. When I departed O&B I was blessed with the opportunity to be a multi-unit leader and run seven of their restaurants as a Director of Restaurant Operations.

I wouldn't have been able to make it to that position without the mentorship, guidance and support that Peter provided. He had a unique way of realizing the maximum potential in someone and pushing them to achieve greatness. Peter taught me many great lessons over the years. But it is the lessons of having drive, passion and desire to be the best that I will fondly remember.

I miss you Peter and I'll always strive to do my very best. Thank you.

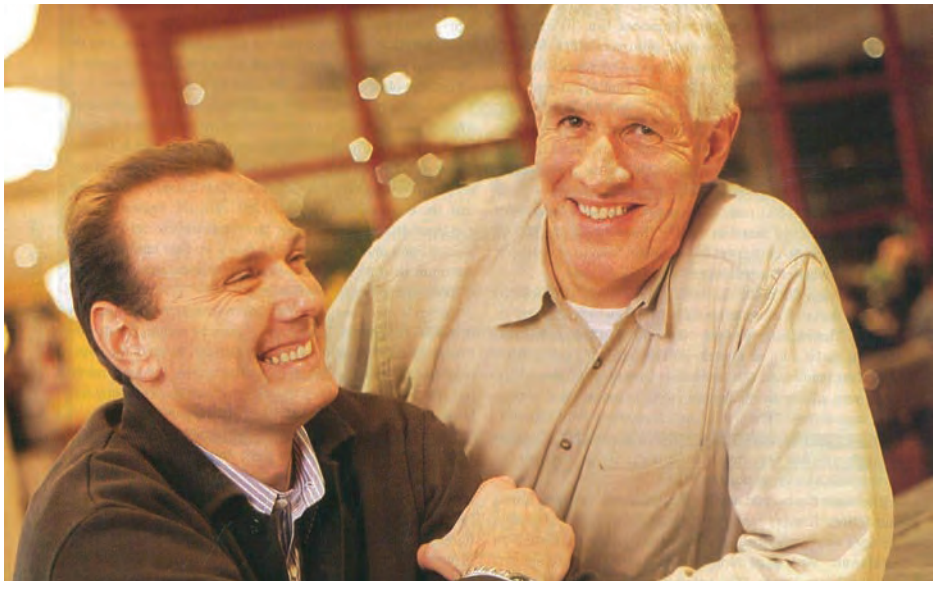
CHEF JOHN HORNE

20 years ago when I started with the company, I really didn't know Peter well. Chef Michael Bonacini was who I faced more as a young chef in the company, working at Auberge du Pommier.

But when I started to know Peter, my view of myself and the impact that I could have in day-to-day operations of the restaurant, and how guests view the restaurant changed. To give an example, as a young sous chef at Auberge one day, Peter came in the back door and asked to see me right away. He took me to the back door of the restaurant and asked me what I saw. I said I saw some cigarette butts, other garbage items and bark from the wood for the fires that had been piled there. He asked me how it made me feel, and I abruptly replied, "It doesn't bother me, it's the back of the restaurant, Sir". He walked me to the front of the restaurant where he had me look around and we both picked up some debris like cigarette butts. We stood back and he asked, "How does this make you feel?" I said, "It's one of the most beautiful restaurants in the city and it looks perfect." He walked me back to the back door and asked, "How does this make you feel?" I said, "Now I feel like it needs to be cleaned up as it is messy." He said, "I want you to make sure this back area always looks better than the front. I want guests to be blown away by how tidy it is. This is going to be your job." I kind of half laughed and made a comment about I don't f---ing smoke so why should I clean this mess up? In his Peter way, he said, "John, successful people are the ones that do things that others are not willing to do. Whether it's picking up cigarette butts off the ground or acknowledging someone's anniversary or birthday, these are the things we do at Oliver & Bonacini that others are not willing or able to do."

I will be honest… that back area did not look amazing every day, and Peter would kick me in the butt for it. But, there isn't a day—and I mean never—that I walk up to that restaurant and don't think about cleaning it, and sometimes I actually do. It's part of the restaurant and deserves to be just as nice as the front. Be the example that you need to be to make it better.

Peter had a way of empowering you to do things to make a difference and taught me that everyone in the restaurant—from the top to the bottom—can make a difference in a day. Whether it's operational, guest forward or with each other, everyone has a choice to make it better or worse that day.





Another example of this was when Peter hired me a goal coach while I was the new chef at Canoe restaurant. Peter had a way of knowing when you needed him to be around, inspire you, and pick you up. I had just gone through my first year at Canoe and felt completely run over by it and wondered, "How the hell am I gonna lead the charge on year two up here and not fall apart?" When Peter was in for lunch one day, I guess he picked up that I was feeling a little deflated and he told me he had a plan. He came back a few days later and bombarded me with all these questions about my life and my plans and the goals for the restaurant. I laughed at him. I said, "Peter, you're kidding me, right? I hardly know what I am doing tomorrow, let alone a vision of where I want to take Canoe and what my personal goals are." He told me that to lead this place we needed to figure this out. As quickly as he came that day, he disappeared. About a week later he phoned me and said, "Your goal coach is coming tomorrow at 2 pm. Be ready." I was so confused. Melissa showed up at 2 pm ready to listen to my goals and how I was going to take Canoe to the next heights. I literally was not in the mood for this, and had 200+ guests coming that night and pretty much didn't give her the time of day. She left me with some homework to do, which sat on my desk for a few days until Peter came in. He sat on the Chef's rail and asked to see my goals. I gave him 100 reasons why I had not done it. He simply said to me, "John, I am not doing this for me or Canoe, I am doing this for you. I am willing to put my own money on the line because I believe in who you are and who you will become, John. Be the person you deserve to be."

He had this line: "You are the most important person" and I was expecting him to say this as he always did, especially with new staff, but he didn't. He knew at this point of my career this was on me to decide where I was going to go with this. That night I stayed up and planned out these crazy dreams for Canoe and my personal life. I emailed Melissa and said, "I am ready for you." I was so proud and ready to show her. She took a minute to read them over and told me to redo them because they were unattainable. Man, I was not happy, but I listened to her and we worked together on a three-year plan of goals for the restaurant and myself. It helped me reset myself and have direction to push towards—not only for myself, but for the restaurant as a whole. It spawned the Open Water sign that a local artist did for us as the motto for the restaurant going forward. "Open water" is a term used in rowing. As the first-place boat, you want to create open water between you and the second-place boat to secure the lead. It was something Peter had said once addressing new staff at O&B and when Melissa had asked if I had a saying or something to stand behind when pushing Canoe forward, this stuck out. The sign still hangs above Canoe's kitchen 12 years later.

Peter was more than a restaurateur, he was someone who believed in and empowered people, inside and outside of his company. He knew if the right people were given the right tools, then great things would happen. I still believe this to this day 20+ years later: that you're only as good as the people that are around you. It is your job to make them better in any way you can and in turn, they will make others better around them. Create the culture where everyone can make a difference and belong there, and you will see great things happen.

PETER JENSEN

Peter Oliver and I were great friends, for a very long time. Many years ago, he was looking to open Auberge du Pommier—it wasn't Auberge du Pommier yet, it was just two little buildings on the east side of Yonge Street that he had to get permission to move because they were historical buildings across the street. He and his wife Maureen and my wife Sandra and I were going to France because he wanted to find a chef for this French restaurant he was going to build. He had a whole map of the trip planned out—where we were going, what we were going to do. Typical Peter. About two days before we were to leave for France, he phoned with the very disturbing news that his daughter Vanessa had juvenile diabetes and he could not make the trip. While that was disappointing, it turned out to be a real boon for juvenile diabetes in Canada because he raised hundreds of millions of dollars for them as a result.

He always brought fun to things. I remember rappelling down the side of the



King Edward Hotel with some British marines in a fundraiser for the Leacock Foundation, which he started because he believed that raising money was important, but that it also had to be fun. We did all of that with jester hats on, so it looked ridiculous.

Peter of course hailed from South Africa, and he once met Nelson Mandela in Toronto who told Peter asked what he could do to assist in South Africa, and Mandela said, "Education.". So, Peter started the Get Ahead Project (GAP) in South Africa, which now has over 1,000 students. His philosophy was that even though the people may not have much money, they had to pay part of the fare so they have skin in the game. My wife and I went over with Peter and Maureen and it was unbelievable. He'd partnered with two private schools in Toronto and the boys were there from Crescent School, working with the South African students on computers. I asked Peter what was in it for the Canadian kids, and Peter said, "Those kids have to see beyond the walls of their privilege." He had a very broad philosophy around those kinds of things.

Peter was bigger than life, physically and mentally, but his most central quality was that he cared. He was also a competitive person. He and I worked out together for over 30 years. He wasn't built as a runner. I'm 6'2 and weigh 150 pounds. I wasn't Peter. So, every single run we went on together, we'd run for five minutes, and we'd run at our own pace, always agreeing we'd turn back at a specific time. I can't tell you the number of times I'd be coming back wondering where he was—I couldn't see him in the distance. I'd be running as hard as I could because I wanted to make up ground, and invariably he would get back before me. I'd ask, "How did you get back before me?". At first, he'd say, "Oh, I was running really well today", and I'd ask again, "Ollie, how did you get back before me?" Then he'd say, "Alright, I turned back early." He just couldn't stand the idea of me passing him on the way back. In 2010, I was dealing with throat cancer. I was down to 130 pounds or so and couldn't walk around the block. He came to see me and said, "I know you're under a lot of strain and stress, but let's go out for a run…" He was only half kidding.

I went to see him two days before he passed on. Even then, he went on about what a great life he had, and how fortunate he'd been to have done all these things. I spoke at his Celebration of Life, and at the end of my eulogy, I reminded the people of how many roles Peter had played so well. From restaurateur to father to great friend, to fundraiser, to building schools. I said, "You know what you spontaneously do when you go the theatre, and someone has performed so well… I leave it to you." The crowd stood and they yelled and screamed, "Well done!". It was really neat to see. We sent him off properly.

> **"He sat on the Chef's rail and asked to see my goals. I gave him 100 reasons why I had not done it. He simply said to me, "John, I am not doing this for me or Canoe, I am doing this for you. I am willing to put my own money on the line because I believe in who you are and who you will become, John. Be the person you deserve to be."**
>
> - Chef John Horne

NICOLE KARMALI
National Director, Events
Oliver & Bonacini Hospitality

Peter was the type of person where you could feel his presence in the room. Every interaction I had with him over the 16 years was so positive and genuine. He made you feel like you could do anything. I would often receive handwritten notes from him or emails letting me know what a good job I was doing and how proud he was to have me on his team.

He had inspired this spark in me to do the right thing each and every time, and to always keep striving for better. I feel a great sense of pride to work for O&B and I feel honoured to help continue his legacy within the next generation.

CHEF ARPI MAGYAR

A warm and special person, Peter Oliver was like a brother to me. I first met Peter in 1985 when I started working for him at Oliver's Bistro and a few years later at Auberge du Pommier. I'll never forget Peter's kindness and compassion when once I was sick for a month and unable to work. He checked in with me daily full of concern for my health and well-being—a true friend. When I returned to work, Peter greeted me with one of his signature hugs.

A skilled leader and entrepreneur, I had the good fortune to work with Peter for five years. When I decided to open my own restaurant, Peter's gracious goodbye gift was a car phone with a pre-set number (the good old days!). I still have the same phone number—a pleasant reminder of his generous nature and our friendship that spanned almost forty years. Peter was a one-of-a-kind gentleman, who will be forever remembered.

VANESSA OLIVER

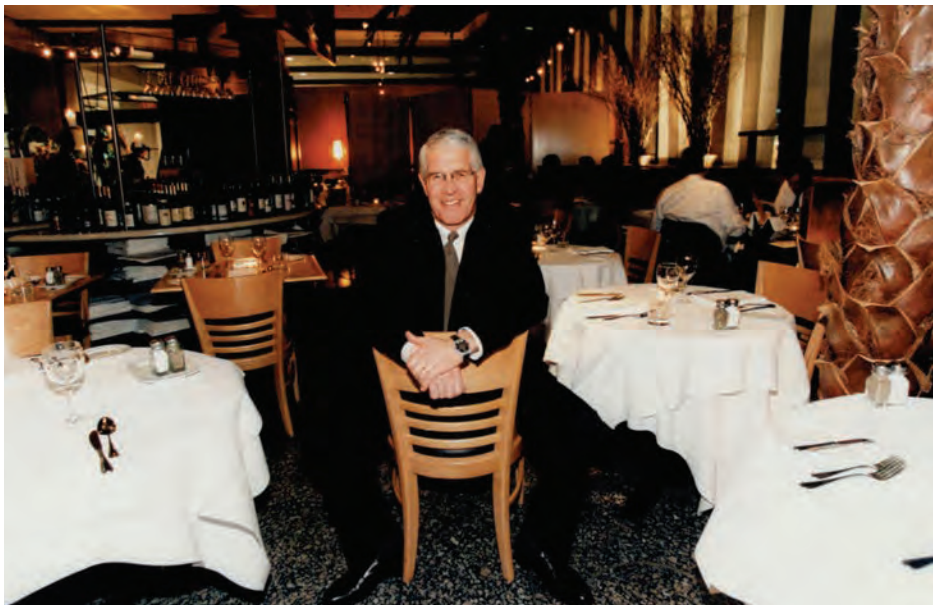
When my father died, we had so many people reach out who felt they had such a meaningful connection with him and seemed to feel like he'd left like an unforgettable mark on them. It baffles me how he was able to do that but still, at every moment, make his family feel that we came first.

We knew we shared him with a number of other people and passions, but he never missed a hockey game, never missed a rowing regatta, never missed a phone call even if it was to say, "I'm in a meeting— can I call you back?". He prioritized, making us feel like family was number one. I don't know how he did it. I think it's a real superpower. We're an unbelievably close family—my mum and dad had the four of us and we all have partners; all of us have children. We've created something he felt was uniquely special and we share

gratitude for how close we've always been, and remain, and I guess that's what blows me away the most.

He valued human interaction over anything else, rather than an email or a phone call, and he certainly wasn't on a single social media platform. And so, his way of communicating was eye-to-eye, face-to-face, shoulder-to-shoulder. It's become an example of the kind of impact you can have on any relationship when you're physically together.

He wanted "the ultimate" in the restaurants he built. He wanted the ultimate experiences for his customers and that completely transcended into our family. From the ultimate dinner at the cottage, to the ultimate itinerary for family visiting us from South Africa, to our weddings. Even the simplest of things could have "ultimate" versions of themselves.
He appreciated life and opportunities so much. I remember when we were kids, we traveled a ton thanks to my mom being an Air Canada flight attendant and the wanderlust she shared with my dad. We would go to Japan for 48 hours or Israel for three days. And any time we saw something beautiful, we'd have this thing where he'd say, "Suck it in guys", and we'd all inhale dramatically to demonstrate savouring and imprinting the moment of beauty and nature and togetherness...he was blown



away by nature. He'd see a bee pollinating a flower at the cottage and say, "Look at that... I mean, look at how unbelievable the universe is, and what that gives us and how everything is connected." He really had a deep appreciation for so many things that I think can often go unnoticed or appreciated by many.

The vegetable garden he created at the cottage would rival an organic farm. He wanted the best kale— we had 12 kale varieties at the cottage, some that even chefs might never have even heard of! He wanted the best vegetable garden because the only rule he had at the cottage was: No mediocre meals. It could be burgers, it could be macaroni and cheese, but it was never going to be boxed or frozen. I loved being his sous chef in the kitchen.

I do think one of his biggest fears was raising entitled and lazy children, and he bordered on ridiculous when it came to making sure we appreciated things. We were spoiled with traveling, no question, and education. He often made a gesture with his hand of turning off a tap and would say, "Come university graduation, that's it. You've got your education, now go figure it out." He guaranteed us that he would spend his last penny on his last breath, so we were never to think that there was anything coming. My siblings and I are all really hard workers who do well in our professions, but I used to say, "Dad, even if you didn't manage to spend your last penny on your last breath, you're gonna be 90. I'll be 60. Hopefully, by then I'll be knocking on retirement's door. You think I'm gonna wait around and spend the best years of my life waiting for anything you're going to be passing on?" I think he'd seen too many who had privileged circumstances, unlike his own growing up, who struggled to find the hunger to reach their potential. He just thought that privilege was the extinguisher of that fire in your belly that drives you to succeed, to accomplish things and figure things out for yourself.

On occasion, he'd treat us with the opportunity to go to one of the restaurants with a friend and of course, as adolescents, we didn't have money to pay the bill. He would speak to the server or the manager ahead of time saying, "Bring them the bill, and let's see what they do." Then he'd have them bring us to the back to wash dishes to work it off. Sometimes he would just let it be a joke to make us sweat, but he was completely paranoid that if we didn't understand the value of a dollar and if he overindulged us materially too often, we might turn into spoiled brats.

When any of us worked at the restaurants, he would go out of his way to make sure managers would be harder on us than they'd be with any other employee. The bar was high for any of his employees to begin with, but there was no moving that bar anywhere but up for his kids. But we're grateful for it. He really believed he was doing us a favour. He said,

"He wanted "the ultimate" in the restaurants he built. He wanted the ultimate experiences for his customers and that completely transcended into our family. From the ultimate dinner at the cottage, to the ultimate itinerary for family visiting us from South Africa, to our weddings. Even the simplest of things could have "ultimate" versions of themselves."

- Vanessa Oliver

"How awful to rob your children of the reward and satisfaction that comes from hard work." It all came from a place of massive love.

As we were growing up, neither one of our parents shied away from calling us out on poor behaviour, and there was nothing worse than hearing from dad that he was disappointed. He was a disciplinarian, but he still managed to really forge unique, meaningful friendships with each of his children—he was my youngest brother's best man at his wedding.

He could never give up on anything—he was wired to always persevere—but there came a point when I remember him saying to me that he was sorry, but he wasn't going to win this round with cancer. He said multiple times, "I won the lottery in life. I could not have hoped for more." But he struggled to make peace with two things:

Firstly, we were $70 million dollars in a $100 million campaign for the Juvenile Diabetes Campaign he was the chair of, and he really struggled with leaving that undertaking unfinished.

The second, even bigger thing, was his impact on his and my mum's nine grandchildren. He also left quite sure that there were still likely a couple of grandchildren left to arrive.

Our life, growing up, was chaos. As mentioned, my mom was a flight attendant, so she'd often be gone three days of the week and never home on the same days. My dad would sometimes sleep on a single Ikea mattress on the floor in the bakery to keep the business running. He was still the best dad out there, but as a grandfather, his schedule was more on his own terms. He took such a thoughtful and strategic approach to how he interacted with his grandchildren. His intent was to try to really positively influence them. He would really think about it and he would occasionally run some of the ideas by me, saying, "You know, I think one of the things we're going to focus on this month is just simple: Do what you say. If you can teach a kid that if you say you're going to do something, you follow through, that's a great thing to teach a human being at any age." Another key lesson he wanted to impart on his grandchildren, but really to anyone who would listen, is the importance of living life with the intention of always "putting in, more



than you take out". Imagine the family, the company, the country we could be, if each of us approached every day like that!?", he'd say with enthusiasm and optimism.

I don't know if I could ever do him justice and describe how my family feels. We're so grateful for all the people we've heard from—we were bowled over...we never imagined the number of people who would reach out. And then, you know, seeing it on television on the news...at the end of the day, he was just our dad and we always felt like we came first. He saw potential in everything and in everyone. So much potential. But in the end, we were just the originals; the original six.

I, and we, feel like the luckiest in the world. The price you pay for great love is great grief. It's pretty impossible wrapping my head around living a whole second half of my life, if I'm that lucky, without him. There is some comfort for my siblings and I though, knowing that he will live on in the many ways he (and our mum) have influenced how we each raise our own families. In our priorities, paranoias and choices. He'd have been the first to say "Buck up, buttercup!", if we wasted too much of life's precious time sulking around missing him, and not "getting on with it".

VAL UPFOLD
Executive Recruiter, HR Consultant & former O&B employee

I worked for Peter for almost 15 years. I started at Canoe as a manager in 1997, when there were only three restaurants in the company. Peter was often in the restaurants those days sitting down with the managers and staff making sure he knew everyone by name. He was adamant about details like leading the new employee orientations and hand-writing Christmas cards.

When I wanted to make a move into HR, I asked Peter for advice and outlined why I believed O&B needed a dedicated HR person. He believed in me, gave me a shot and my HR career began. In the 10 years I was at the O&B head office, he and I spent hundreds of hours





> **“Even after I moved on from O&B, he’d still make time for a call or a coffee and, when I’d bump into him at an industry event, it was like I had never left. I will forever be grateful for his guidance and support over 20+ years. He made us all feel like we were the most important person in the company.”**
>
> - Val Upfold

together, as people and culture were his passions. He was always full of ideas to push the company forward. We planned training programs and manager retreats and puzzled out tricky people situations. He always supported me furthering my education—both in HR when I pursued my CHRP designation, and with wine when I obtained my WSET Level 4 diploma.

In true Peter style, he was also the first person to visit me at home after the birth of my first child.

Even after I moved on from O&B, he’d still make time for a call or a coffee and, when I’d bump into him at an industry event, it was like I had never left. I will forever be grateful for his guidance and support over 20+ years. He made us all feel like we were the most important person in the company.

Peter will live on in the hearts of so many of us and I am forever grateful.

CHEF ANTHONY WALSH

We became friends because of the love of food and cooking … not because we happened to be in the restaurant business together.

Peter revelled in the successes of others—I think he got more excited than I did when my work at Canoe was spotlighted in the papers (no Internet back then). He was the one who insisted on me honouring the James Beard invitation in the early days—he threatened he’d fire me if I didn’t go and show off to the foodies down in NYC.

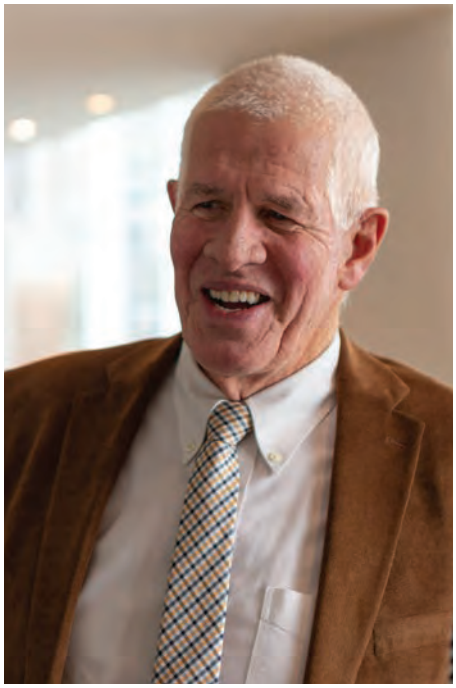
The amount of laughter we had was impressive…. a regular occurrence with us in the work place be it Jump, Auberge or Canoe—and then so on…..“You disturb me Antony!” Was the catch phrase with us. At first, he freaked when I took over the Auberge and was doing one of my new dishes there—Pigeon “à la ficelle”: cured and aged pigeons hung in two of the three fireplaces slowly spinning and crisping throughout the day from the thermals, giving the Auberge dining room the distinct aroma of classic French cuisine. He became the champion of that and implored that ***that*** was the magic… our magic that could bypass political preference, religion, sexuality, etc.

“It’s a beautiful business we are in Antony… Show business.”

JERRETT YOUNG
Co-Founder & CEO of EqualParts Hospitality

I started working with Peter and Michael back when they had just three restaurants. I was fresh out of university, wide-eyed and ready to take on the restaurant world. As I reflect on that person some 23 years later, I know with absolute certainty that I would not be who I am today but for the impact that Peter has had on my life.

His influence and mentorship were as powerful to me as those of a parent. I continue to feel his friendship and guidance all around me as I cultivate my own hospitality career and entrepreneurial spirit. I am ever grateful for the doors he has opened, the network he has helped shape, and the lessons he taught. To borrow a line from Peter himself: he is, to me, “the most important person”.



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Like many others, Restaurants Canada's One To Watch award winner Chef Imrun Texeira's career was rudely interrupted by the pandemic. But that's where comparisons end.

Just prior to the arrival of COVID-19, having just finished as a semi-finalist on Top Chef Canada, he pulled up stakes, sold his possessions and embarked on a well-planned journey that promised to take him through the great kitchens of the UK, Europe and Asia. In mere months, he lost everything.

We met with Imrun to learn how, through the launch of his new luxury private chef service, Wanderlust, his most bitter disappointment has led him to a period of self-realization and clarity and inspired a commitment to helping transform the future of the industry while recasting his own.

Wanderlust:

In Conversation with Chef Imrun Texeira

MM Let's start with your origin story—why did you choose to become a chef, and what experiences along the way have shaped your journey?

I became a chef mainly because I liked eating and being around good food. I wanted to cut out the middleman—I knew that if I could cook good food, I'd be surrounded by it my whole life. I had the opportunity at a very young age to see what the fine dining world had to offer. Food was always a big part of my life and I've always had an interest, passion and love for it, but I'll always remember that initial meal. I must have been like, maybe eight or nine years old and I remember going in to this beautiful hotel for a family meal and sitting down at a table with white tablecloths, impeccable service and an absolutely gorgeous dining room. Dessert was a chocolate mousse and we were given a spoon made out of sugar to eat it. That you were able to create a spoon out of sugar and then eat the spoon after just blew my mind. To be honest, if I saw that now it would still blow my mind.

The kind of creativity that's out there when it comes to food in general, is super cool and probably what really kick-started my passion and led me—out of necessity—to my first job. My parents eventually divorced and I found myself growing up in the Ottawa area with a single mother of four. It wasn't easy for her, so my siblings and I had to do what we had to do to take some pressure off her shoulders. I got my first job at 14 years old at a local chain restaurant. It was driven by necessity, but partly fueled by curiosity.

I've always been ambitious and had a business mindset from a young age. I started lemonade stands and car washing businesses; I cut people's grass—anything a 12 to 14 year-old could possibly think to do. When I landed that first restaurant job, they assumed I was about 16, but found out my real age on my birthday after I'd been there for about a year. You don't see too many kids around that age working at these kind of establishments, so I was very lucky to get that job.

After that, I took a role at a full-service chain restaurant. That's where I got a little more insight into the mechanics of the industry and the good and the bad of what it had to offer. It was not glamorous and was not the best place to learn life skills. I was doing dishes, which, I think we can all admit, kind of sucks. But that was my way in and seeing the atmosphere of the kitchen, the adrenaline that comes from a busy Friday or Saturday night service and then meeting people from various backgrounds and ages was a pure adrenaline rush. I absolutely loved it. The dish pit parlayed into other roles and in about six months I got on the line making quesadillas, chicken wings, nachos—very basic stuff. I was able to get on the line and start cooking with my older brother, and cooks ranging 10 to 30 years older than me. It was a pretty wild experience.

MM So, you're an ambitious kid who finds himself among cooks and then formally trained chefs at a very young age. How were you treated?

When you're working in chain restaurants, there are obviously a lot more teenagers and young professionals just going through the ranks and coming in and out of the place. So I did get thrown in the dumpster or stuff thrown at me as sort of little hazings as has been known to happen in the industry. It's definitely not right, but at the time, I just thought of it as part of the process. On Friday or Saturday nights, cooks would pay me extra money to finish their shift so they could leave and go out. It worked for me at the time.

When I got my next job at a family-owned Spanish wine and tapas bar, management recognized I had a passion for the role. Then, at 16 or 17 I took on a co-op and youth apprenticeship program at the Brookstreet Hotel in Kanata, the same hotel where I experienced that incredible meal. From there things just really flourished. I was working more junior roles, but I stayed after hours to work the night service when they did tasting menus, they had guest chefs and big charity events. I just wanted to learn as much as possible and they took really good care of me and took me under their wing. That job is what built my foundation and my fundamental skills now. It was just a great time to be at that hotel, probably at one of the best times in Ottawa for the reputation of the hotel and the restaurant there and working with chefs that have trained for years and who saw my passion and offered me nothing but love and respect in return.

MM As a person of many skills and interests, you had a lot of options in terms of your career. Was your experience at Brookstreet what made you decide to commit to the industry?

The youth apprenticeship at Brookstreet was a result of a push from my high school guidance counselor. At that time, being a chef was just confirmed as a Red Seal trade in Canada. She explained it would help move me forward faster and we completed the paperwork, but it mostly went over my head at the time—I just wanted to get into the kitchen. Ultimately, I enrolled in culinary school at Algonquin College in Ottawa, which actually wasn't my

first choice. I had originally signed up for Police Foundations, planning to do a concurrent accelerated program in Psychology at Carleton University. I wanted to join CSIS and work as a behavioural analyst. Criminal Minds was probably one of my favourite shows growing up, so I always had that kind of interest.

In spite of the best-laid plans, everything I did just kept pulling me back to the kitchen, and I came to a realization within that first semester. Cooking is what's meant for me. A year later I enrolled in the culinary apprenticeship program and I was able to finish the whole program within six months because of my past experience and youth apprenticeship. The chefs at the college saw that experience and gave me more responsibility and peer mentorship roles. They took me along on events and pop-ups, so I was able to really build an amazing network. Because of those teachers and connections, I got to work at some of the best fine dining restaurants within the Ottawa area ranging from French to Spanish, Mexican, vegan food—all the way up to Atelier.

MM Is that where you started to find your culinary style?

At Atelier, we had a twelve-course blind tasting menu. We focused on molecular gastronomy, so cutting edge techniques and food styles that were rare around the world and completely unseen in Canada. It took me back to the moment I saw the edible sugar spoon at Brookstreet. I did a stage at Atelier, and I saw the edible helium balloon. It blew my mind once again. For me, it's always been that creativity, that curiosity. These are things many of us lose coming out of childhood in a sense, but to this day I still haven't lost that.

Atelier was a big turning point for me. I was there in 2016, a year or two after graduating culinary school. Within a few months, I was putting dishes on the menu, which, at 14 years old, I never would have dared thought I'd be at a place of that calibre so quickly, working with a renowned Canadian chef like Marc Lepine at what was probably the peak of that restaurant prior to COVID. It's mind blowing to look back on that journey.







MM So what drew you to Europe—curiosity, ambition or a bit of both?

I always had sights on the Michelin Guide; the top restaurants. So in between working stints in Ontario, I had time to go to England and stage at some of the top Michelin-rated restaurants. I went to learn the top chefs' styles and techniques and to gain insight into what the Michelin circuit really had to offer in that country. I loved it. Obviously, it's become apparent that there are parts of it that aren't sustainable, but no matter what I do, I've always pushed myself to work at the highest level and push to be the best in my realm.

MM So is the pursuit of that "Michelin discipline" embedded in your most recent venture, Wanderlust? Are you hoping to ascend to that level of excellence, but within a new format?

To be honest, that's the exact idea. I've been very lucky and fortunate to travel around the world and eat at Michelin Star ramen places in Japan, or Michelin Star noodle places in Hong Kong. You see street stalls with these kinds of accolades running a similar version of the business model. If these street stalls or other non-traditional, white-glove-level restaurants can gain this kind of respect, why can't I be the first chef without a restaurant space to have a Michelin Star? Why can't I still offer that level of dining, that level of creativity and that level of hospitality? A lot of private chef work is doing exactly what the client wants, but I try and take that control away based on my creativity and the expertise that I've built over 15 plus years. I take that full creative freedom and offer an experience that no one's really done ever before, at that highest level.

MM So, with Wanderlust, you've expanded your margin potential by eliminating overhead and emphasizing your craft, placing your food—and yourself—at the centre of the experience. You could do a dinner in someone's home, in an abandoned warehouse or in a back alley, but you remain devoted to the highest level of culinary and service excellence.

Yes, and that's the hardest part. It's not like there's a manual. I'm still under 30 with a good base skill set, but in the grand scheme of things, I'm aware that I'm only just starting

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to run my own business in a city that I've never worked in professionally. I'm building a new network, building a new business, and plus all the other work I'm trying to do to better the industry. It's a full plate.

Coming out of COVID, I'd lost momentum, money and resources, but now, I've taken on so much and I feel like there's going to be so much growth in the hospitality and food industry. There are new ways to push the envelope of what experiences and hospitality can be outside of the more traditional models and still make money. Here in Toronto, you're not always going to have to go down to Yorkville to sit in the nicest dining rooms and have the best meals. I have had better food and better experiences at these different holes in the wall within the GTA or at pop-up events and on farms and B&Bs scattered around Ontario.

What I do with Wanderlust isn't the cheapest by any means, but you're paying for good products. I charge what the service actually costs and the people I bring on for the events all get paid a good living wage.

MM You went from a surreal career high with roles at Noma, your run on *Top Chef Canada*—the world was your oyster. Then the pandemic arrived and flatlined that incredible upward momentum. When we talk about mental health in this industry, perhaps we don't talk enough about the extraordinary discipline and effort that goes into building a breakout career. That must have been devastating for you.

Obviously COVID played a big part in so many things and it hit me very hard. In late 2019 after filming Top Chef Canada, I sold 90 per cent of my belongings and my car and packed up what I had left here in storage to move to England. I was working at some amazing places there, and had internships set up in central London, obviously at Noma and at places in Dublin. I was supposed to do a master class apprenticeship in Italy for a few months as well, eventually trying to get down to Australia to work in foodie capitals there. Then, everything went to s—t.

I was on a massive trajectory and was basically slapped in the face with this pandemic. I had to relocate to Toronto, I'd lost my money and had nowhere to work. I tried to get part-time work as a butcher, a baker—but they wouldn't hire me—maybe because I was overqualified, who knows? I'm used to working five, six days a week, 14-16 hours days. Going from that pace to doing nothing was extremely difficult and took a mental toll.





MM Many in the industry experienced a kind of epiphany in terms of their career direction during the pandemic. How did these experiences change you or your perspective?

A lot of the restaurants that I've worked at, especially fine dining, are focused on Western flavours and techniques focused on Spanish, French or Italian cuisine. I started to question why my cultural cuisine, or flavours from the East or South America are not represented at that level. However, working at these fine dining restaurants, I noticed that I was often the only Person of Colour in the kitchen (especially among those of higher professional rank). It was also interesting that when the kitchen staff went out to eat on days off or after service, we were all eating food from my culture or other cultures not showcased in the "great" restaurants. I've worked at some of these amazing places in this country where I've been able to put my dishes on menus and they say, "We can't use that kind of level of spice." or "We can't use that kind of protein because these things aren't going to sell; people aren't going to like that." Well, I come from a part of the world where there's a billion people in one country that can eat this day-in and day-out, so I know there's money that can be made from this.

I've always been told to tone down who I am. Not in the grander sense of who I am individually, but in what I'm trying to showcase. I've always felt that hindrance or that setback and I've always just wanted to destroy all that noise and have full creative freedom. With Wanderlust, I have found a way to do what I do. I'm not here to do burgers and sliders or massive corporate events. That's not where my passion lies. I've been doing blind tasting menus for so long; I'm not trying to lose that. I'm trying to showcase that it's a viable career and business model that gives you creative freedom. My clients are people who make decisions around the clock—they have decision fatigue. So, the only decision they have to make for a special, intimate gastronomic experience is calling me.

All of the events have gone over amazingly well, and it's a lot of fun for me. I have missed working with a brigade and having people come to you—there's definitely a learning curve to building a Michelin Star kitchen in somebody's home. We're in the most multicultural city in the world and most multicultural country in the world, and I'm taking people on a ten-course journey around the world to instill that feeling of wanderlust—that feeling of the everlasting, traveling restaurant. It's never going to be in the same spot. You have to be there. You have to experience it because it's never going to be exactly the same. I think there's something beautiful about that.

I've taken on the challenge in exchange for the freedom to design menus that pull in techniques, flavours and ingredients I've traveled

> “Hospitality and foodservice is an amazing industry, but I haven’t seen many other industries that disregard human emotion in this way. The idea that if you have stuff going on in your personal life, you need to leave it at the door is not realistic or fair. Those things stay on your mind and can really affect your behaviour or how present you are while performing your day-to-day tasks.”
>
> – Imrun Texeira

the world to explore, bring back and help showcase. I think this is the new Canadian cuisine.

MM There has been a growing chorus of voices in the industry refuting the validity of the long-accepted “rules” of fine dining, as well as the quality of the restaurant work environment from a mental health standpoint. Do you see your cuisine and business as opportunities to disrupt the model?

That’s a loaded question, especially coming from a fine dining background. There has been change, but it’s still a white-man-dominated industry, especially at the higher levels. There is the normal professional pressure to perform well and put in the hours the work demands and the stresses of the work environment. And then, when you see first-hand how some people are still treated within the industry... the racism—things I faced myself, especially being in cities that aren’t maybe as multicultural as Toronto, I’ve experienced, endured and witnessed those things happening to other people.

We had to stick together. I’ve seen that in the lowest and the highest realms and there was a breaking point in my career, where I felt I couldn’t stand that anymore. When I had to come back to Canada during COVID, I felt I lost part of my identity. That’s when I truly felt the pressures of the industry. That’s what brought me to The Burnt Chef Project, started by and for chefs and hospitality professionals to address mental health and barriers to wellbeing in the industry. Hearing their mission and what the different chefs on that platform have done to really change the landscapes they’ve worked in is a great model to move forward, and now I’m a Canadian Ambassador for the Project. These are things we really need to address—they’ve never been a priority. Not in my career, and arguably not in general.

MM It’s ironic that in one of the most connected, bonded and social industries, mental health has surged to the forefront of awareness. Are there specific features of the hospitality industry you feel have contributed to the prevalence of mental health challenges?

From the back of house to the people running establishments, people and teams have never been the true priority. Owners and managers need to understand that while they are hiring employees, these people do not actually work for you—in a sense, you work for them. Studies show that if you take care of the people that work for you and you invest in them and their well-being, they will be more willing to provide a better level of service, work harder, and enjoy coming to work even more. But, this is a competitive industry, with large egos. Some of these owners and/or leaders develop a superiority complex and think it’s a privilege to work for them—they take advantage of their workforce because of that.

There’s been an “army” mentality in place, where chefs talk down to their staff and teams. Now we all know that’s not the best way to lead, but it’s been a broken system that repeats and is passed down as a sort of generational pain. That mentality needs to change or die out. Some chefs have changed their ways, and you can forgive, and you can even forget, to an extent. Others seem unwilling to change and are holding so tight to the past they’re holding people back. Unfortunately, a lot of toxic stuff has come from that.

MM The Burnt Chef Project talks about stigma and the need for open dialogue and support for mental health in the workplace. What are your thoughts on how to eradicate the silence?

Hospitality and foodservice is an amazing industry, but I haven’t seen many other industries that disregard human emotion in this way. The idea that if you have stuff going on in your personal life, you need to leave it at the door is not realistic or fair. Those things stay on your mind and can really affect your behaviour or how present you are while performing your day-to-day tasks. We’ve been told forever to fight through the pain, but then you burn out or you cut or burn yourself on the job. That attitude forces things to clash on the job, and that’s part of why you see so many people burn out or even have mental breakdowns. So now, trying to create an open space where people can talk about what they feel they need to is new in this industry that’s pushed up against that for so long, but it’s crucial to create an area of safety, where people can talk about things in an open environment and access the support they need to guide them through.

I was made fun of as a kid drinking protein shakes post service instead of having a couple pints of beer, and for heading to the gym at midnight after work—for living that kind of lifestyle. Now it’s trendy to take care of your health, but this is what we always should have been doing. Mental and physical health feed each other. This career is very grueling for the body and mind, and people need to wake up to the effect it can have. If you’re not setting yourself up for success, you’re going to see that in your later years. Talking to some of the older chefs and seeing how their bodies and health have deteriorated by not really making these things a priority is devastating. I don’t want to be like that in my years to come, so it’s about putting in the work now and teaching others to make those things a priority for



What does "having a healthy place to begin with" mean to you, and what can operators do to attract and retain their people?

You might not bring home six figures doing dishes, but people who are appreciated and respected for the work they do and are compensated to a livable standard is the base of it. People don't understand how far it actually goes to tell someone you appreciate the work they're doing. If businesses are not doing that, we're going to see a lot of changeover and closures this year, especially with the increases in day-to-day living costs.

The places that are putting their people first are going to do well and, when things do get better and we're on the upswing, these places are going to absolutely blow up and flourish.

them. I hope more businesses will offer gym memberships instead of free staff drinks.

What about The Burnt Chef Project's approach most resonates with you?

The interviews Kris Hall, the Project founder, was able to do with some of the top chefs in the UK were massive for me, and now they're expanding around the world. Hearing about some of their challenges, how they're trying to change the business for the better and what they're putting in place to take care of not just themselves, but their employees gave me ideas I could bring into my own career and business.

The way those leaders' experiences translate into the education the organization is putting out is so huge. A lot of people don't understand how much sleep they should actually be getting or the type of food they should be eating to fuel their body or even, in an industry that's been so tight on financial compensation, how to make finances work to our best ability.

You are clearly very ambitious, smart and courageous. As much as your personal experience coming out of the pandemic was devastating, do you feel that being forced to improvise, recreate and retool changed your path and perspective on what you want from your career?

To be honest, it would be a super easy decision for me to go back to Europe or to Asia and work at one of the best places in the world because I have the experience and passion to do so. But… I just believe so much in my vision here in Canada, and in this project—in having full creative freedom and offering that to people.

Coming back here and seeing how the Canadian food scene is evolving makes me want to be part of the change that our industry actually needs, whether that's with The Burnt Chef Project or through the work I do with kids, trying to encourage the next generation to come into this line of work and how to do it in the right way.

I feel so many people have talked about the problems of our industry. Not enough people are doing anything about it. So as much as I'm building the Wanderlust brand and partnerships, a lot of how I'm doing things comes down to trying to be part of the solution. I understand some people might have larger operations than I do, but I'm working at the grassroots level on a weekly basis, talking to elementary, high school and now post-secondary students to really help them get started or guide them forward. Having a healthy place to begin with is the only way we're going to really inspire the next generation.

Chef Imrun Texeira has worked in some of the world's best and most influential restaurants, including 3 Michelin Starred Noma in Copenhagen. Most recently, Imrun received the One To Watch award from Restaurants Canada. This award recognizes that in the development and progression of his career, he has set a new standard of excellence for his leadership, creativity, and ambition.

He has also been named as a recipient of the Top 30-Under-30 Award for hospitality leaders in Canada and as a rising talent in North America by The Art of Plating.

Imrun was a semi-finalist on the Food Network's *Top Chef Canada* Season 8 and a finalist on the Food Network's Chopped Canada Season 3. Chef Texeira was also nominated for the Premier's Awards: Most Successful Recent Graduate in 2016, which celebrates Ontario's outstanding college graduates.

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THE BURNT CHEF PROJECT EXPANDS IN CANADA

BY CHRIS SZEGO



The Burnt Chef Project, founded by Kris Hall in 2019, aims to combat the stigma of mental illness by providing hospitality employees with resources and tools to help them survive and thrive. Last year The Burnt Chef Project provided almost 2,500 hours of in-person mental health and financial training in addition to more than 7,000 hours of free online training on subjects like drugs and alcohol, sleep health and nutrition. As a measure of their reach and industry response, their 62 podcast episodes were downloaded in more than 100 countries.

Perhaps most crucially, The Burnt Chef Project also offers immediate help. Their free, confidential, volunteer-driven support service is available 24/7 for hospitality employees who need help with any kind of mental health issue.

Speaking at Breakfast With Champions, at RC Show 2023, Kris had a fireside chat with Jim Taylor from Benchmark Sixty, discussing the dangers of "burnout" and "presenteeism", conditions that over-index in the hospitality industry and can dramatically impact employee productivity, creativity and innovation.

As Kris explained, mental health is not only a social issue, but a business concern. Mitigating stress can lower the incidence of presenteeism—when staff are physically present at work but not functioning to their full capacity, largely due to poor mental or physical health. Presenteeism can lead to dissatisfaction and resentment and, if unaddressed, can result in employee departure, which is costly and challenging, especially within the current labour market.

In the short term, presenteeism is linked to a rise in errors, which can directly affect customer satisfaction and potentially lead to workplace injuries. In the longer term, it leads to employee turnover, which can be expensive. Replacing an employee can cost $3,000 to $5,000 when you factor in training and ramp-up time. In contrast, staff stability decreases operational costs and tends to lead to greater profitability.

The risk of presenteeism and burnout within the hospitality sector is tremendously high. For years, the overall attitude of the industry has been to tough it out or "soldier through" ill health and personal challenges or crises. That's another aspect of the industry Hall is trying to change. "Presenteeism is one of the key reasons right now that people aren't performing at their best."

One of The Burnt Chef Project's new and growing initiatives is the Ambassador Scheme, a community of hospitality professionals who have an intimate and ongoing understanding of the unique stressors and pressures of the industry. These international ambassadors offer a peer support network, conducting group chats and personal check-ins, and organizing other events on a continuing basis. There are currently six Canadian Ambassadors, hospitality insiders from Newfoundland to British Columbia. Brandon Clemons is Chief Ambassador, responsible for the Canadian ambassador community, which includes Klark Brockerville, Steven Brochu, Brent Parsons, Jim Taylor and Imrun Texeira.

These Canadian Ambassadors are chefs, entrepreneurs and award-winning culinary professionals. Crucially, they each have a profound and personal understanding of both the mental health needs and consequences of the hospitality industry. They have all put in the extra hours to hone and perfect their skills, and some have experienced addiction or even stepped away from the sector altogether when the pressure became too much. These ambassadors understand the pull of hospitality, and just how deep the passion for service can run. They know from experience how easy it is to let your own mental health go untended while seeing to the needs of others.

The goal of the Canadian Ambassadors is to raise awareness of mental health issues and work to eliminate the associated stigma. Reaching out on The Burnt Chef Project blog and through social media, they aim to educate employees, management, guests and the community at large while raising funds, promoting resources and providing support as experienced veterans committed to improving careers and lives, both inside and beyond the kitchen.

Most of all, the Canadian Ambassadors want to be the change they want to see in the industry by offering empathy, understanding, and practical steps forward. "We bloody love this industry, but we have to actually look at the reality of it," Kris says. And that means providing the resources, support and training needed to make the entire industry healthier and more sustainable in the long run.

Canadian hospitality workers who'd like to talk to someone about their mental health can text HOME to 741741 to reach out in complete confidence.

THE BURNT CHEF PROJECT

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It's time to talk about mental health and racism.

The cumulative stress that stems from systemic, overt, and covert acts of racism and microaggressions—living with the reality that race plays a role in the daily cadence of your life—can lead to racial trauma.



Knowing (or wondering) whether race played a role in being passed over for a promotion, or in where you are seated in a restaurant are day-to-day, mentally invasive and intrusive thoughts that can lead to vulnerability, stress and oppressive emotions including anxiety, fear and anger. Left untreated and/or unvalidated, the effects of racial trauma can affect focus, job performance and the ability to form strong social bonds in the workplace.

Chef Megan Roberts shares her personal reflection on the intersection between race and mental health and her lived experiences in the foodservice and hospitality industry.

"If you can't take the heat, stay outta the kitchen." Hearing that phrase when I was younger always made me think about making conscious decisions. It told me that if you are aware of the conditions you're choosing to enter, don't complain when the inevitable occurs.

At the time, it seemed like a necessary mantra to live by but now, as a Black woman who is a chef, it only adds to my fatigue. When the inevitable happens, there are many feelings and thoughts that go unspoken to avoid confrontation—which also adds to the weariness.

I entered this industry at the age of 18 as an energetic young woman excited to be a hostess. I was the only Black girl who applied for the position, so it was very interesting to learn that despite being hired for front of house, I was quickly shifted to the position of "expo".

I quickly realized that everyone in the back of the house was a visible minority. It seemed that those who are more inclined to hardships were the ones taking the most heat, literally and figuratively.

The sixth grade was my introduction to the history of slavery, forever shifting what I knew to be reality. Because of what I learned, I started to become more aware of the things people said, how they acted and reacted to me. It goes unsaid, but these experiences are often internalized and we are forced to "deal" with it. When you're raised in a Black family, there is a stigma around speaking openly about mental health. I was taught that maintaining a plastic smile, a façade, was the preferred method of dealing with things and this expectation transferred into my kitchen life.

I noticed the microaggressions and comments but almost instinctively brushed them off because that was how I was taught to handle volatile situations. It was almost as if I was told, "This is what comes with the hand that you were dealt in this game we call life, so you need to deal with it." If you can't take the heat… so to speak."

The kitchen showed me that if I ever chose to speak about the stresses of work or express feeling overwhelmed, it wasn't important. It was almost always minimized and I would be told to "push through" or that "it's part of the job".

"When you're raised in a Black family, there is a stigma around speaking openly about mental health. I was taught that maintaining a plastic smile, a façade, was the preferred method of dealing with things and this expectation transferred into my kitchen life."

It's high time for those in this industry to acknowledge that although we are in a service-oriented profession, we cannot give from an empty vessel. Open and honest discussions about the mental distress experienced by many, particularly people of colour, are overdue. The centuries of unacknowledged and undiagnosed trauma carried within our DNA are manifesting in increasingly visible ways.

Burnout rates are escalating, substance abuse as a coping mechanism is prevalent, ADHD diagnoses among adults are increasing, and yet employers complain about the difficulty of finding workers.

People are exhausted.

Employers must actively educate themselves on creating safe and supportive work environments. The concept of individuality has little place in a kitchen, where honesty, vulnerability, and teamwork are vital. But why shouldn't this spirit of partnership extend to all aspects of the industry? Employees should be able to take a mental health day without guilt and employers must remember that everyone has off days, for we are all human.

The era of being shouted at in the kitchen and being pushed beyond our mental and physical limits must end. More people are recognizing their worth and setting their boundaries. Anthony Bourdain once said, "Without experimentation, a willingness to ask questions and try new things, we shall surely become static, repetitive, and moribund."

It's time to embrace new approaches to mental health in the foodservice industry, as the current culture is indeed becoming "static, repetitive, and moribund."



***Megan Roberts** is a professional Chef who worked her way up from dishwasher to kitchen manager before pursuing formal culinary education at Centennial College. A committed advocate for mental health and racial equality, Megan launched Megan Mondays with the goal of spotlighting the mental health challenges often faced in high-pressure culinary environments.*

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The Art of **Welcoming** the **2SLGBTQIA+ Community**

BY HANNAH WIGGIN



Fruit Salad event photo courtesy of Katie Rawn.



Fruit Salad event photo courtesy of Katie Rawn.

As PRIDE 2023 comes to the end of a month of celebration, the industry is learning that the pot at the end of the rainbow is filled with more than just profit.

For the month of June, PRIDE Month communications and colour palettes begin to infiltrate our inboxes and social feeds and businesses decorate their spaces. From national banks, to superstores, to alcohol companies, businesses proclaim their allyship and commitment to inclusion to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community through diversity-focused events and promotions.

The promotion of equity, diversity and inclusion during PRIDE Month is an important step in fostering welcoming and safer spaces, but participating businesses are encouraged (and arguably obligated) to represent PRIDE in a meaningful and authentic way, every month of the year. PRIDE originated as a movement of rebellion, symbolizing protest and community activation. Its presence can, and should, be experienced and felt year-round, as are the social injustices at the heart of its existence.





Ren Navarro, owner of the consulting company Beer Diversity, brings valuable perspective to diversity and inclusion in the hospitality industry as a queer Black industry leader. "I don't cease to exist at the end of June. What happens on July 1st?", she asks.

When businesses approach Beer Diversity for consultation and education, Navarro recommends approaching PRIDE Month as an opportunity to launch inclusion and diversity initiatives that will carry on throughout the year. Improving diversity and inclusion in the hospitality industry is an ongoing process that requires a commitment to growth, learning and action. By taking proactive steps to create a more inclusive workforce, fostering an accepting work culture and creating equitable customer experiences, hospitality professionals can help create an industry that welcomes and benefits everyone.

Disrupt Social Conventions with Community-Led Events. *Rethink the types of events you host in your space.*

Activism through community events is an impactful and accessible way to promote inclusion within your business and shake up the status quo. Recruiting the expertise of community-led organizations can make sure your event is on point and encourage customer engagement. Fruit Salad, founded by female entrepreneur Sarah Barnhart, is a Hamilton, Ontario-based organization that responds to the lack of safer spaces dedicated to 2SLGBTQIA+ women, femmes and gender non-conforming folks. Fruit Salad organizes events that encourage queer joy in its many forms, including queer prom, speed dating and drag shows as well as educational workshops. Barnhart and her team work with restaurants and hospitality spaces, noting that the company has "grown organically because people see it in action". She believes that when folks get a taste of what lies beyond the drinking and dancing—the feeling of joy and connection that happens when events and spaces allow folks to be "queer enough"—they experience the magic at the heart of Fruit Salad's success. This is the reason Barnhart started Fruit Salad—to allow hospitality spaces and employees to come as they are, welcoming patrons to present as their truest, authentic selves.

Sharing space in this way requires a commitment to hosting, engaging and interacting with different groups within your space. Barnhart points out that the venues that have worked well for Fruit Salad, and those where she sees opportunity for growth, are "spaces that believe in what we're doing and are all in". To prove the point, Fruit Salad has developed a roster of regular operators and venues that invite them back time and time again, increasing efficiency and profitability for both the event venue and the organization, and integrating Fruit Salad events into the host operation's regular calendar.

Barnhart's goal for Fruit Salad is for operators to see value in what they're doing and welcome them to come host in their space. "This is one of the things that shows their patrons and their community that this is something that is of value, that works and is something people need".

She also points out that PRIDE Month is a great way to open up your space and start to commit to allyship. "I think it's about continuing to learn; it's a constant evolution. Allyship is action, not just a thing you say." She recommends that operators work with established community organizations and individuals to celebrate, collaborate and communicate about issues and build enduring partnerships to help understand what safer spaces for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community really look like. "I think it's really important when spaces talk about the events we're hosting, that they use the word "safer" instead of "safe", because we can't guarantee that," Barnhart emphasizes. She points out that collaborative partnerships with hospitality operators are an important part of the success and safety of Fruit Salad's events. "We're doing our best as human beings

> "I think it's about continuing to learn; it's a constant evolution. Allyship is action, not just a thing you say."
>
> - Sarah Barnhart, Fruit Salad

to create spaces where people will be comfortable and feel safe. By working with organizations that are pioneers within their communities, you can create a more welcoming and equitable space that benefits everyone."



Fruit Salad event photo courtesy of Katie Rawn.

Prioritize authentic representation in your social channels. *What kind of social media feed do you want to create?*

"Representation" is first about recognizing 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the community, and second (and most importantly) about affirming the value of queer folk to others, and even to themselves, by making space for and celebrating community events.

For businesses that engage with (and benefit from) the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, representation should be a year-round, on- and offline consideration, present across all communications, both personal and virtual. All business communications can and should represent and include all community groups and team members, from the different promotional or event images selected for social media or websites, to the types of social media accounts you interact with to the language used in your team meetings or marketing strategies. Taking the time to consider the words and images you use has an impact on whether staff and/or prospective patrons will feel welcome, seen and valued when they visit or work in your establishment.

Authentic and thoughtful representation can be extremely powerful on social media and can help businesses grow their online reach and community. While "virtue signaling" (inauthentic or "shallow" posts designed to promote the moral character of a business or person) or other attempts to earn social validation by influencing public perception of inclusion or engagement with a specific social group can backfire, there are ways to engage and support without implying a connection a business has not yet earned.

Celebrate real touchpoints, moments and events with people and groups you have welcomed or collaborated with using real photos from events you've hosted. Sharing moments captured at 2SLGBTQIA+ events you've hosted on your social pages, from weddings to drag shows, can help grow your network and build trust with the community.

Fruit Salad's Instagram page tells a story of their organization, with 2SLGBTQIA+ folks laughing, dancing and hugging—all under perfectly-chosen lighting in moody shades of blues, purples and pinks. If their page feels revolutionary, it only underscores the point. Even in the age of social media, we don't always see Queer love represented in all its forms on business feeds. According to Barnhart, the styling of Fruit Salad's digital presence was completely "accidental". When Katie Rawn, affectionately named Fruit Salad's "Chief Joy Capturer", attended their events, she documented people being "their most beautiful and joy-filled selves", creating an authentic and impactful experiential brand impression in a way Barnhart never truly imagined. Event photography on social has been foundational in building the success of Fruit Salad IRL, with folks traveling from all over to enjoy events and venues outside of the region reaching out to host Fruit Salad parties. Barnhart also notes that the social media impact has led to their community members using the same businesses and venues for their own private events like weddings, because "they know it's real for you (the venue) and it's somewhere they will be comfortable".

Set the tone for staff and patrons. *Were you walking the walk or just talking the talk?*

A culture of inclusion should be a core value reflected in every aspect of your service, experience and marketing strategy. The language you use in your marketing materials, the accessibility of your physical spaces, the availability of gender inclusive washrooms and the use of gender-inclusive language by your restaurant team are all aspects of a meaningful commitment to inclusivity.

When looking for new venues to host 2SLGBTQIA+ focused events, Barnhart says, "I feel like I need to be doing extra research and checking in more to ensure the commitment is top down. It can't be just one person on the staff who is trying to convince their homophobic owners that this is a good idea. It needs to be a real part of that space's identity and ethos."

Ren Navarro founded Beer Diversity in 2018 after seeing a deep need for change in how diversity and inclusion were being championed in the hospitality community. Navarro pairs her perspective with over a decade of hands-on experience and approaches the industry with passion, knowledge and her trademark sense of humour. She summarizes her approach as "starting small and not

over-complicating it". As a trailblazer in the craft beer community, both in Canada and beyond, Navarro has become an agent for real, meaningful change.

Navarro says Beer Diversity is all about working with your toolkit and building authentic, long-lasting relationships. An easy way of effectively communicating an actionable diversity strategy to both employees and patrons is through a value statement. "It's your "House Rules" for those who are in your space," she explains. "It includes your staff and your vendors, and extends to current and prospective patrons. It sets the tone." Navarro suggests businesses keep their value statement simple: "This is what is important to us. If you can't go along with it, you can't be here".

Posting your value statement by your bar, in your washrooms or in other public spots shows staff and guests you are accountable and committed. Navarro notes that these value statements also support and empower your staff. "You, (the patron), walking in means you have accepted the terms and conditions. By staying, you've signed off on it."

When it comes to codes of conduct, Navarro underscores the importance of collaboration to make sure your code is truly inclusive, authentic and actionable. She suggests operators collect data from their team, and answer key questions: "How will you ensure that the code of conduct is enforced? Does this code of conduct work in action? Does your team feel safe and included in discussions on inclusivity?" Navarro wants spaces to take the initiative seriously, keeping communications short and sweet and not overthinking it. "Don't take six months to do it! They're five points, max".

Navarro explains that ownership needs to "be okay and comfortable with empowering their staff", pointing out that it's also okay for leaders to find themselves behind in the game of culture shifts happening within their own team. "Don't stop it. Let it happen and do your own research. If it looks like it's thriving, let it bloom!"

Navarro has worked with businesses where ownership is not on the same page as management and their staff and identifies the challenges that can be faced while trying to maintain inclusive spaces without honest backing from ownership. "If there isn't buy-in from the upper echelons, then don't do it", Navarro says, having seen full staff turnover because owners aren't willing to create more diverse, equitable spaces. She also underscores that owners should realize there can be real financial implications to not doing the work.

Navarro also champions making business accessibility investments and commitments available to both staff and patrons and suggests posting this information on all digital platforms, including reservation and delivery apps and even business Google listings. "Folks use your Google page to find your hours — they should be able to do the same for accessibility measures." She has seen staff with pronoun pins and with signs that let patrons know which languages staff can communicate with them in, including ASL, and emphasizes that these extra pieces of interaction can really matter to the bottom line, helping grow your regular patron community and your business stand out in a tough employment market. Navarro encourages operators to embrace being a welcoming space for everyone, every day.



"It's so simple. People make it more complicated than it needs to be."

Voices Matter. *Learn from the personal experience of others who want you to succeed.*

A business commitment to workplace diversity, equity and inclusion requires awareness, empathy and evolution on a daily basis. Certificates and accolades are just wallpaper and lip service without action and accountability, so if you're not sure how to engage meaningfully with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, reach out and connect with experts who can help get you there.

The CGLCC is Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce, uniting and advocating for the more than 100,000 2SLGBTQIA+ -owned businesses that generate more than $22 billion in economic activity. Their Rainbow Registered Program helps Canadian businesses and community groups ensure they are effectively accepting and welcoming the 2SLGBTQI+ community and work with businesses to evaluate and certify their 2SLGBTQI+ friendly status. The CGLCC also provides information, advice, resources and marketing tools that support certified businesses in marketing themselves as safe, welcoming destinations and workspaces for the community.

"Rainbow Registered is quite a unique program," says Connor McKiggan, the program's business development lead at the CGLCC. "We're the only program of our kind that accredits businesses as 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive workspaces in Canada. You can't just put up a rainbow flag in a Zoom meeting and get the accreditation, we want to see active commitments and work done on the ground. We're here to really help weave inclusion throughout your business practices."

The CGLCC works with businesses along all parts of their welcoming journey, McKiggan points out, even those who are just getting started. "Sometimes a business isn't quite sure what that first step is going to look like, so we work with them to get accredited by helping them meet our four best practice pillars that define inclusion."

Spencer Toth, Rainbow Registered Program Manager, agrees. "We are seeing such a huge uptake. During PRIDE Month, I saw a

> “I think a lot of folks aren’t aware of the buying power that exists within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and that there’s a lot of loyalty within the purchasing and travelling that these folks do.
>
> - Connor McKiggan

lot of interest sparked on social media about the program, and it’s really nice to see. My background is in tourism, so I always consider safety when I go into a community. Research has shown that, for Queer travelers, the number one consideration is safety when they’re choosing where to travel. So, to be able to go on RainbowRegistered.ca and see this map of all these businesses that are accredited through the program and say, “Hey, here are some spaces where I know I can go and have a good experience and feel safe and included” is really powerful.”

The CGLCC team also points out that diversity, equity and inclusion is an ongoing journey, not just a trend or a box to be ticked. Toth says, “There’s not really an optimal time to start. It’s not a “one-and-done”— you don’t go and do Rainbow Registered and throw your hands up and celebrate. There’s always new best practices and we do ongoing education and workshops and provide resource guides to help our members continue to grow.”

Meaningful representation and inclusion flows through all aspects of your business and has the power to enrich and diversify both your customer base and your workforce. Navarro wants businesses to be open to taking their first steps, even if they’re a little unsure. “Don’t be afraid to mess it up, don’t quit. Learn from it, regroup and be okay with being held accountable”, she encourages.

Canada is home to approximately one million people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+, representing four per cent of the population above the age of 151. The business case for welcoming Canada’s 2SLGBTQIA+ community is clear and compelling, as McKiggan lays out. “I think a lot of folks aren’t aware of the buying power that exists within the 2SLGBTQI+ community, and that there’s a lot of loyalty within the purchasing and travelling that these folks do. When folks see a business up on the Rainbow Registered website, they know that it’s not just a rainbow flag that’s up there—they recognize that the business has actually made active commitments to the community, and that’s something that folks want to encourage and invest in. When I travel around Nova Scotia, I know the businesses that have the PRIDE flags up or that are Rainbow Registered, and I’m always visiting them and recommending them. It’s a great way to access and break in to the 2SLGBTQI+ travel market and potentially get a lot more clients.”

Now, more than ever, consumers make conscious decisions about where they spend their money. We are well-accustomed to delivering on consumer expectations on the plate, but it’s time we look beyond food and drink to the experience of service and welcoming. If you’re not sure where to start, reach out to the community to ask for support and guidance.

Visit **beer-diversity.com** to learn more about how you can make diversity part of your culture.
Follow @beer_diversity

Visit **rainbowregistered.ca** to learn more about the CGLCC’s Rainbow Registered program and start your accreditation journey.
@rainbowregistered

Visit **fruitsalad.ca** to connect and learn about upcoming events in the Hamilton, Ontario area.
@fruitsaladhamont

[1] Statistics Canada; Canada at a Glance, 2022 - LGBTQ2+ people; 2022-12-01; https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/12-581-x/2022001/sec6-eng.htm

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GROUPEX CANADA'S REBATE PROGRAM HELPS CHUMMY'S GRILL STAY BUSY AND GROWING.

Manager: Ian Turpin | Groupex member since: before 2016 | Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario



Travel just east of the city of Sault Ste. Marie on Frontenac Street in the Rankin Community of the Batchawana First Nation and you can't miss Noel's Place, a popular local stop comprised of a convenience store with a drive-thru window and the very popular restaurant, Chummy's Grill.

The busy operation that started as just a tiny shop on a gravel lot has continuously expanded over the years, originally adding a fish and chip truck, then a permanent building housing both a full convenience store and Chummy's Grill, a full-service, dine-in operation seating 60 people, with a parking lot to match. The growth is attributable to two things: the quality of the relationships the employees have with the local community and good food that favours local ingredients.

The food at Chummy's is simple, delicious and generous with established hits like their fish and chips and weekly Fish Fry made with locally-sourced, whitefish, pickerel and lake trout seasoned and battered on site, "Macaroni and Tomato Soup" that is known and craved throughout the region, and "Indian Tacos", made on a house-made Indigenous scone, and baked fresh daily. Chummy's also offers daily baked goods including their legendary cinnamon rolls and bear paws, which don't last long. "We've expanded three times since I got here in 2016," says Ian Turpin, who manages Noel's Place on behalf of the original owner, Noel himself. "Most recently to accommodate the parking for breakfast", which has become one of his main draws for the portion size and the quality of the food. "During the week, we get a lot of business from local tradespeople for the breakfast, and sometimes we see the same people again for lunch on the same day."

Ian attributes the resilience of Chummy's throughout the pandemic to several factors. First, the community continued to support the restaurant during lockdowns, and second, their insistence on continuing to serve the

same quality of food, even as prices soared. "When I started, Chummy's was already using Groupex, and the Groupex benefit program only got more comprehensive during COVID, as the products got more expensive," Ian recalls. "There's no way somebody like Noel would have been able to survive the combination of minimum wage and food price increases without Groupex' assistance."

Noel's place is a family owned business that draws roughly half of its employs from the Batchewana First Nation. Tracy has direct oversight of the restaurant operation as well as serving in the dining room herself five days a week. "She's been here since day one of the permanent structure opening. She's indispensable." Now seating 60 people, the dining room is known for its growing collection of chainsaw carvings from BC artist Pete Ryan, which includes various plaques, eagles and even a sasquatch.

Chummy's Grill, and restaurants like it, are meeting places that are crucial to community life. As prices increase and supply chain woes persist, supports like the rebate program from Groupex Canada provide not just a little cash back, but essential relief. "The rebate helps us manage through all of this," says Ian. "When I started here, the minimum wage was $11.60. It's going up again in October, which will push a lot of restaurants off the cliff. That rebate really, really helps to manage that and keep the doors open."

Another aspect of the Groupex Canada service model Ian particularly appreciates is that, as new products are added to their rebate program, he doesn't have to apply for rebates all over again. "If Groupex brings on new partners you're buying from, they initiate the rebate on their own, he explains. I don't have to call and ask for it. They make sure it happens automatically and that's really helpful. None of their competitors even come close to what they offer restaurants."







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[1] *NPD Supply Track, September 2021*



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