MENU

CANADA'S FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE



IMAGINATION + INNOVATION

Industry leaders, visionaries and tastemakers share their hopes and dreams for the future of foodservice

+

KATE GERWIN
on mentorship

CHEF JOSEPH SHAWANA
on teaching, competition and his next big swing

CHEF MATTY MATHESON
serves up some truth

POST SHOW ISSUE

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The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Dear Readers,

Following another extraordinary RC Show, we can't help but reflect on the sheer vibrancy and energy that defined this year's event. The Show was a resounding success, and for that we extend our deepest gratitude to our incredible sponsors, dynamic exhibitors, insightful speakers, dedicated volunteers, and enthusiastic attendees. Your unwavering support and participation once again elevated this gathering into a premier culinary and hospitality experience, showcasing the very best of our industry. Planning is well underway for RC Show 2025, taking place April 7-9, 2025, and we look forward to meeting you there.

With patio season in full swing, Canadian restaurants are delivering unforgettable outdoor dining experiences and, despite the somewhat disappointing weather we've encountered in various parts of the country, their resilience and innovation continues to shine. Restaurateurs and chefs are embracing the elements with creativity, ensuring that diners can still savour the delights of al fresco service, rain or shine. It's a testament to the spirit of our industry, where adaptability and a passion for excellence go hand in hand.

June also brought the vibrant and joyous celebrations of Pride across Canada. This year's Pride festivities were nothing short of spectacular, with communities coming together to honour diversity, inclusion, and love in all its forms. We are immensely proud of the foodservice businesses that have gone above and beyond to create welcoming and inclusive spaces for everyone.

In this issue, you'll hear from a sample of over 150 visionaries and leaders on their hopes for the future of foodservice. Kate Gerwin, bartender and trailblazer, shares her raw insights on the importance of mentorship in the hospitality industry in The Column. We take a deep dive on the important contribution of newcomers to the success and evolution of foodservice with Boston Pizza and Denny's. We connect with Chef Joseph Shawana to learn more about the importance of culinary competitions, his role as a culinary educator and what he's up to next. Hear highlights from the first-ever all women leadership panel at RC Show, which I was honoured to take part in. Elle Asiedu of The Re-Seasoning Coalition reflects on the first-ever Black Experience Pavilion at RC Show, and we interview hospitality HR expert Val Upfold on her incredible career at O&B and her recent work in Ghana. We learn about how FCC is offering new options for foodservice entrepreneurs to scale and hear from Jeff Doucette from Field Agent on how restaurants can measure and win with customer experience. And. So. Much. More.

Thank you once again for your dedication and passion for the industry that delivers belonging, discovery and joy. Here's to a summer of delicious moments, shared stories, and more moments that showcase the unwavering spirit of the Canadian foodservice industry.



Kelly Higginson
President & CEO

Summer 2024
Volume 9 Number 3

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The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

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THE PASS



THE QUARTERLY CANADIAN RESTAURANT INTELLIGENCE REPORT: Q2/24 AVAILABLE NOW!

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Restaurants Canada's dedicated industry research and analytics team has released the Q2/24 edition of The Quarterly Canadian Restaurant Intelligence Report. Packed with the latest data, insights, trends and analysis, this amalgamated digital report is a must-read for senior industry leaders.

Scan the code to download The Quarterly

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING CANADIAN FOODSERVICE & HOSPITALITY

RC Show Restaurants Canada

Restaurants Canada extends its heartfelt gratitude to all the sponsors, speakers, judges, exhibitors, attendees, partners and volunteers who made RC Show 2024 a resounding success. Your support and participation were instrumental in creating an unforgettable experience and supporting the advocacy work and resource development Restaurants Canada performs on behalf of the Canadian foodservice industry.

RC SHOW 2025: SAVE THE DATE

April 7-9, 2025 | Enercare Centre, Toronto

Mark your calendars and get ready to join the Canadian foodservice community for another exceptional event filled with innovation, networking, and inspiration to fuel the success and evolution of the industry.

La Tablée des Chefs

LES GRAND TABLÉES

Toronto | Monday, October 28, 2024 | Fairmont Royal York
Montréal | Monday, November 18, 2024 | Palais des congrès de Montréal
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Each year, La Tablée des Chefs gathers brigades of renowned chefs from the Montréal, Québec City, and Toronto regions to create one-of-a-kind menus for three unique, epicurean events: Les Grande Tablées.

La Tablée des Chefs invites you to become agents of change by indulging in a flavourful gastronomic experience while supporting their mission to feed and educate, one exquisite bite at a time. The evening begins with a cocktail reception, followed by an impressive five-course dinner meticulously crafted by talented chefs and prepared by students from local culinary schools.

Learn more about La Tablée des Chefs and register for Les Grande Tablées at: tableedeschefs.org



photo by Victor Diaz Lamich

RESTAURANTS CANADA ON DEMAND

Virtual Workshop: Supporting Workplace Mental Health for You & Your Team

presented by Not 9 to 5

Hassel Aviles, founding director of Not 9 to 5, provides guidance on the importance of self-check-ins for leaders and the resources needed to create a workplace that prioritizes mental wellness for leaders and their teams.

Scan the code to watch now

CHECK OUT THE ALL-NEW RESTAURANTSCANADA.ORG



restaurantscanada.org has undergone a complete redesign! The new website will provide members and business associates with easier access to the latest news, research, toolkits, trends and resources essential for navigating the foodservice business landscape of today and tomorrow.

Find new and intuitive research tools and special features behind the member login now at **restaurantscanada.org**.

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TERROIR SYMPOSIUM: PART TWO
NOVEMBER 2-3, 2024 | CALGARY, AB

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Coffee Versatility & Excellence for Restaurateurs:

How to serve up unforgettable, sustainable and profitable coffee experiences with Chef Jason Bangerter of Langdon Hall



When it comes to delivering a sustainable, unforgettable coffee experience, Nespresso sets the gold standard. That's why top chefs like Chef Jason Bangerter of Langdon Hall are exploring new ways to create with Nespresso Professional coffee and equipment, and their guests are all in.

Nespresso is more than just a coffee brand; it's a partner in delivering a premium dining experience. Their blend of high-quality coffee, elegant engineering and design, and eco-conscious practices make it an ideal choice for restaurateurs who strive to offer the best to their guests while reflecting practices that align with their values.

Nespresso coffee ambassador Julien Carbone and Langdon Hall's celebrated Chef Jason Bangerter recently collaborated on a unique series of exquisite signature coffee experiences designed to blend Carbone's extensive knowledge and Bangerter's culinary finesse to elevate the coffee experience to new heights. Their resulting signature coffee experiences demonstrate how chefs and operators can position coffee as a standout menu feature and highlight innovative, reproducible techniques that enhance your customer experience and the flavour profiles of your dishes.

Chef Jason shares some of the craft and creativity behind these remarkable coffee presentations...

MM Your iced latte with black walnut syrup is a near-perfect collaboration between Nespresso's coffee artistry and your farm-to-table cuisine. How did it come together?

Chef Jason Bangerter: *When I design anything, it starts with the things I love. And it always begins with what is growing right outside our back door at Langdon Hall.*

For this preparation, it is springtime. The maple and black walnut trees are producing tree water that we have collected and cooked down into syrup. Maple is very common; however, we have more black walnut trees on the property than we do maple. I thought it would be an interesting combination and something new for our guests. Black walnut syrup is floral and unique, and it pairs very well with the ICE INTENSO Nespresso iced coffee. The syrup and the fresh nut are featured in the dish, offering a true taste of the Langdon Hall property at springtime.

MM What can seasonal coffee recipes add to the restaurant experience and bottom line?

JB: *A very important part of creating the ultimate guest experience is knowledge sharing, and storytelling. The process of working with the specialists at Nespresso is an exciting opportunity to dig deep into the origin, the process and the terroir of the coffee selected. Not only do we develop something delicious, we design a signature coffee creation with a story that is interesting to the guest. This story sells the experiences.*

MM You have also used coffee as an ingredient, infusing your panna cotta with Nespresso Origin India coffee and lifting its woody, spicy and savoury notes with a Kahlúa-spiked sabayon. Can you share any tips on introducing coffee-infused menu items to increase guest uptake and engagement?

JB: *Coffee is delicious anytime of the day. Its combination of bitter and rich roasted savoury flavour can be used in many applications. Sauces for game and red meats, bbq rubs, puddings, ice cream, crumbles, cakes, cookies and pastries—it is a very versatile ingredient for either savoury or sweet applications.*

MM You've also done an incredible bouchon cake sweetened with Langdon Hall maple syrup perfectly paired with Nespresso Professional Exclusive Selection Nepal Lamjung. How should restaurants craft, present and promote coffee pairings?

JB: *It starts with education. Staff need to be confident when it comes to telling the stories and exciting guests about the coffee and the pairing. If the staff are excited about it, it's very easy to promote.*







What value can coffee pairings bring to guest experience, operational efficiency and profitability?

JB: *Pairings offer the perfect combination—especially at the end of the meal. A couple bites of a warm maple bouchon, some small cakes, chocolate biscuits, or an elaborately designed dessert...*

The end of the meal is a very important step of the dining experience. The storytelling around the perfect coffee pairing sets the tone for the final touch. Coffee is a very important part of many of our guest's dining experience. Elevating it with a pairing offers an extraordinary ending to an extraordinary meal.

It is the final memory of the experience.

Can you share a couple of surprisingly delicious, non-traditional coffee pairings or flavour combinations?

JB: *When I visited the Nespresso facility in Switzerland with a dozen international chefs, we went through the green bean cupping process and spent several days learning about coffee and Nespresso quality control and sustainability practices. Very impressive! We were challenged to create a dish with coffee on day two. A farmer delivered some beautiful vegetables and we created a unique and delicious dish: smoked parsley root with shaved field mushroom, celery hearts, Brussels sprouts, Nespresso crema anchoiade, and cacao.*

A coffee sauce with venison and braised cabbage is also a lovely combination, but I think my favourite might be a velvety-smooth vanilla coffee panna cotta or creme brûlée preparation.

ABOUT CHEF JASON BANGERTER & LANGDON HALL

Chef Jason Bangerter, the celebrated culinary visionary behind Langdon Hall, brings a wealth of expertise and creativity to the table. Langdon Hall, nestled in the picturesque countryside of Ontario, is renowned for its luxurious accommodations and exceptional dining experiences. Under Chef Bangerter's leadership, the restaurant has earned a prestigious reputation for its innovative, farm-to-table cuisine, emphasizing locally-sourced ingredients and seasonal flavors. With a passion for excellence and a commitment to sustainability, Chef Bangerter continuously pushes the boundaries of culinary art, making Langdon Hall a destination for food enthusiasts and connoisseurs alike.



EVERY CUP IS AS GOOD FOR THE PLANET AS IT IS FOR THE PALATE

Invested in sustainability for more than 30 years, Nespresso professional capsules are elegant, easy to store and made with at least 80-85% recycled aluminum. Their Canadian recycling program, in partnership with Purolator, offers hassle-free capsule recycling. Evidence of the dedication to sustainability that earned them the title of the World's Most Sustainable Coffee Company in 2021 and B Corp™ certification in 2022. By 2035, Nespresso aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions, driven further by a culture of innovation that includes biogas-powered production centres and refurbished machines.

LEADERS IN QUALITY, TASTE, CONSISTENCY AND VARIETY

The synergistic, efficient design of Nespresso Professional capsules and commercial standalone machines ensures that—with just the touch of a button—restaurants can serve exceptional coffee in seconds. Their impressive range of 24 different coffee capsules is meticulously crafted to tell unique stories of passion, taste and tradition. From specialty blends designed for milk recipes and iced coffee to those infused with natural flavours, the diverse selection not only highlights the brand's dedication to innovation but also its commitment to delivering a premium coffee experience tailored to individual tastes and bespoke experiences.

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While many premiumization concepts add complexity and cost, Nespresso Professional solutions are invested in empowering foodservice operators to successfully add and implement signature presented coffee experiences crafted to deliver delight while minimizing labour and increasing profit margins. Because of Nespresso's long-term commitment to quality, taste, consistency and variety, they're a natural co-creative partner for any operation—from casual to fine dining—seeking to add reproducible and relatable dimension to their dining experience.

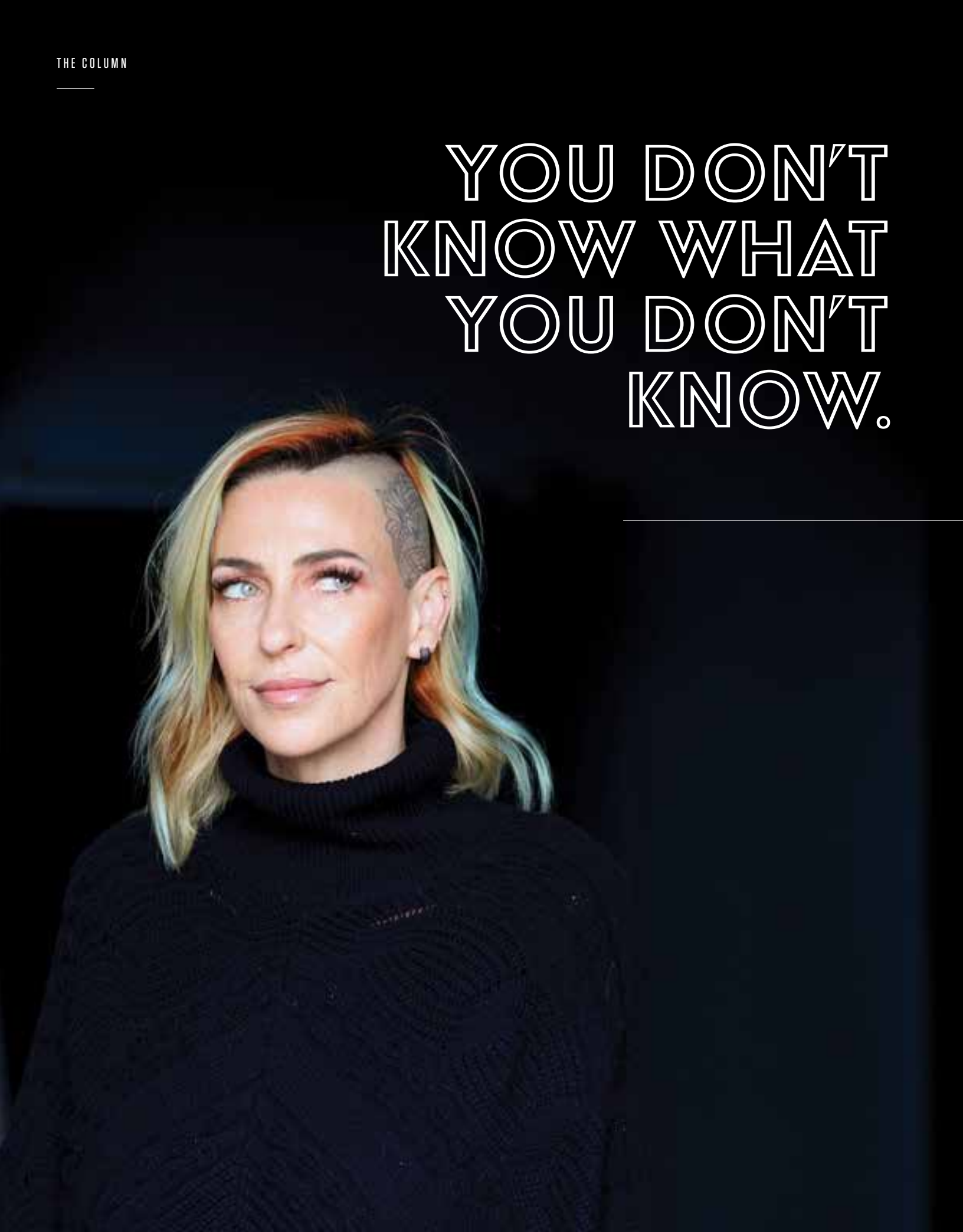
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YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW.



MENU IN CONVERSATION WITH **BAR ICON KATE GERWIN.**

A force of nature behind the bar (and in general), Gerwin shattered glass ceilings as the first woman to claim the title of World Bartending Champion, and her journey since has been nothing short of astonishing. Kate's story is a bittersweet cocktail of grit, passion, and the relentless pursuit of perfection, for both her craft and herself.

We connected with the mastermind behind Happy Accidents to uncover the secrets of her somewhat reluctant success and learn more about what drives one of the industry's most influential figures to make time to mentor the next generation of bar talent.

MM Can you describe the role mentorship has played in your career?

Kate Gerwin: *For me, the role of mentorship in my career is a little tricky. I'm older—I'm 45—and there wasn't a lot of mentorship around when I was coming up. Did I have great people who taught me? Yes. I had good bosses and bad bosses, but I learned a lot more about what I didn't want to do and who I didn't want to be than I ever did from people I respected and emulated. I really didn't have a lot of super-strong people who wanted to take me under their wing—I learned more from the negatives—observing the acts of others and questioning why we don't treat people better, or create safer environments, or do more education? The answer was always, "Well, that doesn't make money," or "You've got to have thick skin to succeed in this industry; you've got to be tough to be here."*

I thought, "What if hospitality is the problem, and not the people?" So, my role or approach to mentorship has been about trying to create an environment for people I don't feel was there for me.

MM So, your initial interest in bar mentorships was a reaction to supports you felt were lacking for you?

KG: I think so, but don't get me wrong—I worked for people who taught me a lot, like the foundations of bartending, techniques, cocktail making and how to read a room, but there was a lack of a certain humanity and compassion and this idea that, especially for women, you had to be tough and you had to have thick skin and you had to be able to put up with things. I don't know that that's the healthiest way to get people to love an industry, you know?



OFF THE TOP WITH KATE GERWIN

Favourite tool of the trade?
Pour spouts. Invest in really good pour spouts. If your pour spouts are dripping all night, at an ounce a night, that's 25% of your profits going down the drain.

Favourite glass?
I just made a glass! It's called The Glitch. It's a glitched-out Collins glass. I love high balls, long drinks and Collins glasses, but all we had were dumb, straight Collins glasses. My glass is new and different, and I'm really excited about it.

Most overused expression?
You don't know what you don't know.

Strangest cocktail request?
My friend Adrienne wanted a baloney cocktail.

Go-to ingredient?
Cardamom.

Crowning achievement?
Best Bar Team award. It was really, really big to me. The team ethos is really important. It's one thing to value the people you work with, and another for people to really see it.

Greatest regret (so far)?
Many, many years ago I had a mentorship program called "Girls with Bols" that wasn't very intersectional. It was supposed to be about female empowerment, but there were elements about it that were problematic, and when it was brought to my attention, I was so defensive I didn't listen. I could have made some changes quickly and easily, but I felt attacked, and I didn't react the way I should have. Years later, I realized how unwelcoming some of the things were. I regret not being a more empathetic and vulnerable person, and just saying, "Hey, you're right, I see this, and I want to change it." I was so stuck in what my view of feminism was, and my own experience, I wasn't open to hearing other views.

Favourite place?
My hot tub.

If you could have a drink with any cultural or historical figure, who would it be?
Bell Hooks. I think that Bell Hooks could teach me a lot.

"MAKE YOUR DRINKS, MAKE YOUR MONEY, DO YOUR THING, BUT IF YOU REALLY WANT TO MAKE CHANGE AND YOU WANT THE INDUSTRY TO GROW, YOU HAVE TO TRY YOUR BEST TO EMULATE THE CHANGE THAT YOU WANT TO SEE."

It's really not that you have to be thick-skinned or tough to be able to handle things. It's more that you need to know how to navigate those things with grace and compassion. I also think the customer isn't always right. Putting up with bad behaviour just because someone is a customer wasn't my idea of what hospitality is all about. It's not healthy.

MM Your point gets at one of the sleeping challenges in the hospitality industry—building the reputation of industry roles as careers, and people working in it as true professionals. Having to tolerate the extremes of poor behaviour is not only unfair and unsafe, but also a kind of gaslighting—like no matter what, the employee's needs are secondary to the customer's.

KG: *You know, back when I started out, before the era of the 'mixologist', and even sometimes now, you were treated like an un-skilled, uneducated worker certain customers felt they could boss around. When you've really invested time, energy and effort into studying and to learning technique and you're trying to give people this incredible experience, it can be a lot to have person say, "Look, I know I'm in a Michelin-starred restaurant, and I'm sure you're a great chef, but I really want some singles on Ritz crackers and you have to give it to me exactly how I want it because that's what you're here for."*

Hopefully these expectations are changing, but personally, no one ever allowed me the space to feel uncomfortable about it. It was more like, "This is who we are, and this is what we do. Just smile and tell the customer they're right."

MM As you grew in your role and earned a certain amount of influence and clout, how did you feel was the right approach to hospitality industry mentorships?

KG: *There are lots of different types of mentorship, and there are lots of different mentee-mentor relationships. I think a lot of times people just like look at their bar manager or their boss as a mentor, but sometimes it's harder for your boss to be your mentor because your mentor should really get to know you on a different level and*

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understand your goals. Their boss is also likely to coach them based on what works within the confines of the company, which may not be the best thing for the advancement of their career.

You can have mentors you work with from a distance, even if that's Zoom calls. I think the first thing for me is a clear and open conversation about concise goals. As a mentor, I want to know what a mentee wants from me and my time. Do they just want to learn about cocktails or are they also wanting to learn about business or how to react to and manage social situations? Open communication about goals and expectations can really help establish the mentor-mentee relationship and make sure it works for both individuals.

MM What are some of the most common challenges in the bar space, and how can mentors help mentees address them?

***KG:** A lot of people end up behind the bar because they were a server or something and they get promoted or thrown in. They're given a recipe and told to make a drink, but there's no real training on the fundamentals, like this is why you shake, this is why you strain, this is how you shake, and here are the effects you're trying to get. These are the flavours that go together. This is how you should stand so you don't have a bad back or a popping shoulder like I do at 45 years old. Just teaching that foundation is so important. Chefs are taught knife skills and all kinds of core techniques, but bartenders are just expected to figure it out as they go.*

Beyond technique, there's a whole world of hospitality—empathy, guest interaction, team building, leadership—it's not just 'go in, make the drinks and go home.' There's a whole other realm to the role, like making people feel welcome and seen and navigating the spectrum of human interactions while still making drinks that are delicious and making sure your technique is good, while juggling all of the other things that we have to do.

MM People are a central focus of all hospitality careers, but the need for emotional intelligence and mental health training is inextricable from the broader suite of bar expertise. While the public may appreciate bartending excellence, do they really consider all that goes into it, from the people aspect to the gastronomy of the bar experience?

***KG:** The common consumer doesn't realize how much we learn and know. Not only the origin and history of spirits, their production process and the culture behind them, but the ingredients and flavours, and how they're layered and combined. Add to that, the empathetic part—how someone is doing, whether someone wants to be left alone or if they need a friend, whether someone is on a date and they're feeling uncomfortable and may need help navigating that situation. We see the comfort of others as our responsibility. It's a lot, and some nights you go home and think, "I'm done."*

It can be physically and emotionally draining.

MM Is this why you've made mentorship a large part of your professional offering?

***KG:** Yeah. My bar is in a small market; there's not a lot of cocktail culture here, but we've become a place for people to go and learn. Four of my bartenders moved here from out of state, solely to work in Albuquerque, New Mexico at Happy Accidents because they wanted to learn more, expand their career, and be a part of something they weren't finding wherever they were living at the time.*

I don't think being a great bartender, being a great entrepreneur or being a bar owner is just about having a fancy cocktail list. For me, if you're not thinking bigger than that, I don't feel like you should have that kind of platform and success. Make your drinks, make your money, do your thing, but if you really want to make change and you want the industry to grow, you have to try your best to emulate the change that you want to see.

I was just told I made the top four for Bar Mentor in the U.S. and I cried. I spent a lot of time teaching; I traveled to Portugal to teach at Flair Camp and I traveled to New York to teach in The Culinary Institute for BAR 5. I do a lot of mentorship programs because I don't think my legacy is a cocktail I made. I want my legacy to be my contribution to the people who will come after me, and who will change the industry and make it better than I did. That's what would make me proud—especially in an



industry that hasn't really shown people that it can be a career. I want people to know that it can be.

MM So, congratulations, first of all...

***KG:** Thank you!*

MM And secondly, what do you look for in potential mentees?

***KG:** A lot of times people will say, "I want to learn from you," or "I want to work for you," and honestly sometimes it's just clout chasing, where someone thinks that they will become great by proximity. If people think working with me is like popping a pill that makes them a great bartender, that's just not how it works.*

My favourite saying is, 'You don't know what you don't know.' It's part of something bigger called the Dunning Kruger effect where we get to this place in our lives where we're educated and we're smart, so we decide we want to be greater. We think we know, and we think we're amazing, but we really have no idea that there's this whole big, huge, wide world out there that's far beyond our reach. I get a lot of people who think they're at this really high level and they tell me they're a great bartender and that they want to work for me, and they don't know what they don't know.

*That aside, for me, empathy is the most insanely valuable quality as a bartender, and the second is vulnerability. Being able to admit when you don't know something or being able to say, "I f***** up" is one of the best things ever. If you don't have that accountability and that vulnerability to be able to really want to learn, I have to pass. I can't teach you those kinds of things. I don't have the energy for that.*

The third thing is a good, old-fashioned work ethic. There is a lot of studying, a lot of tasting, and a lot of culture and social consideration and issues that need to be navigated. If you're stuck on classic cocktails and historical dates, but don't want to pay attention to anything else in the world, it's a lot more difficult for me, as a mentor, to get to the goals.

The first thing I usually do with a mentee is ask them to identify their goals, and I'll give them a small little task, like a research assignment. Depending on what they come back with, I know if they just want to take the pill or if they're serious. If they're serious, I'll put the work in. I'm here for that.

MM At this point, do you believe that a system of new talent, supported by the right mentors, has the potential to transform the industry?

***KG:** I don't think I'd be spending my time trying to mentor people if I didn't think so. I think that's what has to happen. The 'old guard' has to take their learned knowledge and share it, while also trying very hard to be empathetic to change. I think I learn just as much from my mentees as they learn from me. I'm always trying to learn more about how things are changing and what issues are important to younger professionals because, I'll be honest, I think I personally was very problematic many years ago. I told people how I grew up with the boys and how you have to be thick skinned and brush it off. You need to banter back, grin and bear it.*

I probably told a lot of really talented humans that this industry wasn't for them, when it really was the industry that needed to change. We needed to change. These kinds of things are really important, but they're also hard. I want to tell people that yes, work-life balance is incredibly important and taking time away is really, really important, but this takes work, especially when people want to get to a really high level of bartending and be one of the best. Where I'm at now took many, many years of studying, exhausting nights, travelling and trying to stay on the cusp of what everybody's doing, learning endless techniques, trial and error in the kitchen, and failing, then getting up and going at it again.

Just like doctors and lawyers and many professions that are more respected, where people have spent years learning, going to school and putting their nose in books, we have to do the same thing. If you don't want to invest time and energy into your career, it's going to be really hard to get to that level.

MM How is bar mentorship distinct from mentorship in other areas of hospitality?

***KG:** First, it can't be lost on you that you peddle legal drugs for a living. That's literally what we do. I don't drink behind the bar. I don't want my guests to see me drinking. I don't want my staff to see me drinking. This is a job, not a party, and I take it really seriously. It's not what I want for my industry.*

When it comes to bar mentorship, you need to be empathetic and be a people-person, it shouldn't be based on alcohol or alcohol promotion or the idea you need to have a shot when you get to work so you can interact with people. One of the things other hospitality roles don't have to deal with is that we're literally the keys to the castle when it comes to this legal drug that we're peddling, one that can be addictive, and that is a depressant. We also work in a field that is battling depression during a very depressing time in our country.

If you want to really be successful and you want to have longevity, you have to recognize what we are serving what we are doing: don't get high on your own supply.

MM So when and why did you decide to become a professional bartender?

***KG:** I didn't really decide... My background is in wine, and I also used to teach at a culinary school. Growing up in Sonoma and Napa, I was always around chefs. My ex-husband is an amazing chef and we opened a restaurant here in New Mexico with a wine program about 14 years ago. We opened this fine-dining and wine restaurant and people wanted margaritas. I ended up creating a cocktail list that was different and more culinarily inspired. We did a Canela syrup with blood oranges and cilantro salt—I was really just trying to break out of the Margarita land. Soon, people were coming more for the cocktails than food or wine and we started getting a lot of recognition for our cocktail program. We had big names like Tony Abou-Ganim and Charlotte Voisey coming in for drinks. I won the Spirits Hospitality award, beating out The Bellagio.*

*They flew us to the awards and I actually met Charlotte and she told me the industry needed more strong women and invited meto Tales of the Cocktail. I went for the first time and literally thought, "These are my people." The wine industry was a little bit more difficult for me. I didn't quite fit in. I was always outspoken, I was a female, I had tattoos, and I did my own thing. It was just a hard industry to break into. I worked at fine dining restaurants in Napa where they asked me to cover my tattoos. When I met all these bartenders, it was like I was home. I felt seen and loved for who I am and I was like, "F*** yeah, let's do this."*

"THE WINE INDUSTRY WAS A LITTLE BIT MORE DIFFICULT FOR ME. I DIDN'T QUITE FIT IN. I WAS ALWAYS OUTSPOKEN, I WAS A FEMALE, I HAD TATTOOS, AND I DID MY OWN THING. IT WAS JUST A HARD INDUSTRY TO BREAK INTO. I WORKED AT FINE DINING RESTAURANTS IN NAPA WHERE THEY ASKED ME TO COVER MY TATTOOS. WHEN I MET ALL THESE BARTENDERS, IT WAS LIKE I WAS HOME. I FELT SEEN AND LOVED FOR WHO I AM AND I WAS LIKE, "F*** YEAH, LET'S DO THIS."

MM What are your thoughts on the 'bartender as therapist' trope?

KG: *People refer to bartenders as therapists, but I'm very wary of that. We're not therapists and we can't offer anyone mental health advice. If you're going to be successful as a bartender, you do need to learn to read people though. If you can't read people and connect, it's going to be difficult for you to excel in this industry.*

MM Beyond the place of bartenders in social lore, how can mentorships and other positive steps transform the lingering perception of bartending and other hospitality careers as transient gigs?

KG: *There are so many things. For one, I think more bartenders need to become owners. Corporations aren't going to change the industry. There are some corporations that are changing their business model because they know they need to fit a certain mold to get good employees, but are they really doing it because they want to see actual change? I think a lot of that is performative, and I think it's profit driven.*

Right now, companies are realizing long-term employees or more profitable, and that even though training is very expensive, finding good people makes you more money, but I think real change only happens when the people who are the workers become the bosses and the leaders.

I want to see more bartenders become bar owners instead of just working for corporations. For me, that's huge. The unfortunate hurdle is that it's expensive. You need backers and banks don't want to offer loans to bartenders as it is. I was really lucky. I had what I call 'dream guests'—swan song investors who were regulars who loved me and gave me a personal loan to open a bar. Now, I have banks and investors coming to me. I never could have done it if it wasn't for a couple of guests at my bar who said they wanted to see me do good things.

When we started looking for lease spaces, landlords were hesitant. They wanted a corporate tenant because they felt they'd have longevity. Now we're looking for a second space and people are coming to me. They want to invest now because I'm doing these great things and winning awards, but when I was just a bartender, they didn't care. I think that bias is a huge hurdle.

I also wish I had a clearer path for myself. I had to find mentorship outside of the industry and go to other entrepreneurs. I found a real estate mentor, a business mentor and someone who understood grants. I found someone who worked with the economic development centre. I needed adults in the room, and they really helped me figure it all out.

Bar mentorship needs to go beyond cocktails and start to really think about mentoring entrepreneurship. That's where I want to see our industry focus on next.

MM What makes a good leader and mentor?

KG: *I think being a good leader is being vulnerable and being accountable for your actions and letting people see that you have made mistakes. I am far from f****** perfect. Knowing that is really important.*

ABOUT KATE GERWIN

Kate Gerwin is a celebrated bartender and hospitality consultant, known for being the first woman world bartending champion and the first American to win the Bols Around the World Bartending Championship in 2014. In her over 20-year career, Gerwin has been recognized by Drinks International as one of the industry's "Top 100 Most Influential Figures in the World" from 2019-2023. She has worked as a certified advanced master sommelier for top Napa wineries, consulted on the docuseries Bar Rescue, and was a finalist in the Netflix series Drinkmasters. She has taught at Le Cordon Bleu in Scottsdale, AZ, and the New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, VT. Currently, she is an instructor for the prestigious Bar 5-Day program at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park.

In 2015, Gerwin was inducted into the Tales of the Cocktail Hall of Fame Catalyst Awards, celebrating significant contributions to the spirits and cocktail industry. Her bar and distillery in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is her passion. Opened in 2021 with partner Blaze Montana, Happy Accidents has twice won "Best New American Cocktail Bar" from the Tales of the Cocktail Spirited Awards and liquor.com. This year, the bar won "Best U.S. Bar Team" at the Spirited Awards, a coveted accolade for Gerwin. Kate and Blaze were named the Drinks Industry's Innovator of the Year 2023 by Seven Fifty Daily. Kate also received the "Bartender of the Year" 2023 award, and their bar recently won the prestigious
"Bar of the Year" 2024 award at the Bar & Restaurant Expo in Las Vegas. Kate recently designed a glassware collection for Onis, a prize for her global win in the Glassology competition in 2023 in Athens, Greece.

Follow Kate: @alchemistkate



Empowering restaurant owners with the FROM DOLLAR ONE hub.

In the exciting world of restaurants, where the love for food mixes with the demands of business, owners wear many hats. They're chefs, managers and entrepreneurs, always striving to blend creativity with success.

A 2023 study by Interac Corp.[1] (Interac) highlights the increasing rise in entrepreneurialism, a trend that extends into the restaurant industry—46 per cent of Canadian entrepreneurs have noticed a surge in interest within their personal circles. In endeavours like owning a restaurant or working within the culinary field, the work extends far beyond the confines of a traditional nine-to-five job. Yet, with opportunity comes responsibility. As restaurant owners juggle multiple roles, it is essential to have a seamless solution for managing the intricacies of their financial operations.

Alvin Sharma, Product Owner, Interac Debit, at Interac, underscores the importance of addressing the ongoing pain points within the restaurant industry: "Canada's economy thrives on the contributions of restaurateurs, who, amidst their busy operations, often find themselves needing straightforward financial solutions. Many encounter difficulties in navigating the complexities of financial management and are seeking clear guidance and resources."

With just 15 per cent of entrepreneurs polled expressing confidence in their financial acumen from day one of launching their business, and nearly half indicating they face challenges in accessing relevant information, the need for a comprehensive resource hub becomes increasingly apparent. Enter *From Dollar One* by Interac, a resource dedicated to promoting financial empowerment, preventing burnout, and offering actionable guidance on leveraging Interac products like Interac® Debit to reach vital business milestones.

For restaurant owners, the *From Dollar One* hub offers numerous insights tailored to their unique needs and challenges including practical information on financial management, covering everything from optimizing payment systems to streamlining payroll processes using Interac e-Transfer®. By leveraging the Interac suite of payment solutions, restaurant entrepreneurs can not only reduce transaction costs but also streamline aspects of their operations, freeing up valuable time and resources.

One key advantage highlighted by Sharma is the role of Interac Debit payments in facilitating seamless transactions. By embracing this payment method, restaurant owners can enhance the efficiency of their payment systems while providing customers with a convenient and secure dining experience. Additionally, Interac Debit offers significant cost savings over other payment cards, helping restaurateurs reduce transaction fees and improve overall profitability. Moreover, the free templates provided by Interac offer restaurateurs valuable insights into their cash flow, helping them to make informed decisions. These templates include a balance sheet, invoice template, and a checklist to prepare for tax season.

In addition to its practical benefits, the *From Dollar One* hub offers restaurant owners a resource for emotional support. Understanding the toll the industry can take on mental health, the hub provides invaluable information on stress management, resilience building in the face of hardship, and work-life balance. By nurturing both the financial and emotional well-being of restaurant owners, *From Dollar One* empowers them to not only survive but thrive in a competitive landscape.

Collaborating with industry experts, the *From Dollar One* hub provides restaurant entrepreneurs with access to a wealth of knowledge and expertise, empowering them to overcome challenges and seize opportunities for growth. From tips on keeping track of your money, understanding basic payment terms, streamlining payment operations, and protecting yourself against common scams, restaurateurs can utilize the hub to explore their potential and work towards sustainable success.

Ultimately, *From Dollar One* aims to democratize financial literacy and empower restaurant entrepreneurs to be equipped with the resources to help achieve their goals. As Sharma puts it, "Our aim is to enhance value, driving economic growth that lifts all sectors, ensuring prosperity across the board." With the support of Interac and its innovative platform, restaurant owners can navigate the industry with confidence, knowing that they have a trusted partner by their side.

For more information, visit: interac.ca/en/dollarone

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[1] Interac survey shows Canadian entrepreneurs are embracing the nine-to-thrive - Interac

the FINAL COURSE:

Celebrating Patrick Saurette's Remarkable Career

As legendary Edmonton restaurateur Patrick Saurette retires and the iconic The Marc Restaurant enters a new chapter, we reflect on his remarkable journey and the lasting impact he has made on the city's culinary landscape. Patrick, along with his wife Doris, has been the heart and soul of The Marc, an establishment renowned for its exceptional food, warm hospitality, and unwavering dedication to excellence. As Patrick embarks on a well-deserved retirement, we take this opportunity to share personal memories and extend our heartfelt thanks and best wishes to a true pillar of our community.



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"I first met Patrick at Il Portico, where he was the general manager and part owner of this iconic Edmonton Italian restaurant. Then, in 2009, when the Restaurants Canada Board was seeking an independent Edmonton restaurateur to join, former Director Barry Arndt suggested Patrick as a good fit. It did not take long for me to understand why his colleagues thought so highly of him, and I was pleased that he was interested in joining our Board.

Soon after Patrick was elected to the Restaurants Canada Board of Directors, he informed us that Il Portico was closing and that he and his wife, Doris, were planning to open their own restaurant near the old Il Portico location. The Marc quickly became a popular Edmonton eatery and was recognized as an award-winning bistro, featuring great food and outstanding personal service. The restaurant attracted Edmonton's business leaders, government employees and political leaders from all parties, as it was close to the Alberta legislature and ministry buildings.

Patrick and Doris exemplified what it means to be hands-on, independent restaurateurs committed to excellent food, wine and service—they are Mr. and Mrs. Hospitality. They worked hard, always warmly greeted guests, and delivered the kind of personal service Patrick was known for. They also had a great relationship with their staff and suppliers and contributed significantly to the Edmonton community. Pretty much every visit to Edmonton, I always made a point of dining at The Marc and got to know Patrick and Doris well.

Patrick accompanied me to numerous meetings with government officials during his many years as a volunteer on the Restaurants Canada Board and reached out to his many Alberta restaurateur colleagues in support of our policy positions. Eventually, he served on the Restaurants Canada Executive Committee and became Board Chair. He also played a key role and was the local public face of our very successful "Alberta Restaurant Realities" campaign leading up to the 2019 Alberta election. This took incredible courage, as most restaurateurs were hesitant to delve into political policy discussions for fear of offending some guests.

Patrick understood there might be some guest backlash, he did it anyway to help Alberta's restaurant industry. It is a testament to his character and leadership that, throughout the Alberta Restaurant Realities campaign, he maintained the respect of the media, his restaurant industry colleagues and politicians of all stripes.

I last visited Patrick and Doris in April, just before the sale of The Marc, and wished them all the best for their well-deserved retirement plans. Patrick and Doris will be remembered as kind, compassionate and generous icons of the Edmonton restaurant industry. Restaurants Canada is grateful to Patrick for his many years of service on the Board of Directors and as Chair during a tumultuous time in Alberta politics. His contributions led to the implementation of many of our campaign policy recommendations, which significantly benefited Alberta's restaurant industry. We wish him and Doris a very well-deserved retirement!

- Mark von Schellwitz, Vice President, Western Canada, Restaurants Canada

"What can I say about Patrick Saurette? Shortly after settling in Edmonton, I was dating a girl. She loved food and the industry as much as I. She told me we absolutely had to dine at Il Portico. Being new to the city I hadn't heard much about the place, but she convinced me to pay them a visit. Over twenty years later as I look back on that visit, I can't recall much about the meal, except that it was quite good. What I do remember was the impression that Patrick and his entire team left on me. It was one of the very first times I felt like a guest in someone's home, rather than a customer in a business. I don't imagine he recalls my visit, as I was a young cook, definitely unknown at the time, but we were made to feel special, regardless of clothes we wore, the watch on our wrist or the bottle of wine we ordered. That experience stayed with me, and it's a reminder of the type of hospitality I want to provide for my guests, each and every night.

But Patrick was more than that. Throughout his time in the industry, he was a pillar in the community, supporting countless organizations whenever asked. He committed to being a voice for the independent restaurant owner and stuck his neck out on more than one occasion. Over the years we got to know each other as peers. He was an ear when I ventured out on my own, offering advice, support, guidance and words of wisdom when he was called upon. Somehow, I always felt a little better about things after a visit with Patrick. He had that way about him.

As he embarks on this next chapter of life I want to thank him for paving the way for the rest of us, and let him know that his impact on our community won't soon be forgotten."

- Chef Paul Shufelt, Chef and proprietor of @workshopeatery @woodshedburgers @hayloftsteakfish and @thegreenhouseyeg

I met Patrick many years ago while I was a guest at Il Portico. He was the best host I had ever seen and, later on when I got to work with him at Restaurants Canada, I realized his calm demeanour and warm hospitality wasn't just the way he operated his restaurant, but the way he treats everyone in his daily routine.

He is the consummate hospitality professional and makes us all remember what we aspired to be in this industry!!! It was a pleasure to work with Patrick and to learn from him. I wish him all the luck in all of his future endeavours."

- Mo Blayways, President and owner-operator, 1st RND and BRBN Street

"Many years ago, a true story, I was invited for lunch at Claude's restaurant to celebrate a special occasion. We were fortunate to be seated at "Patrick's table." I must confess that I do not remember anything about their exquisite cuisine; however, what is still vivid in my thoughts is this young man and his interaction with genuine care and respect for his customers.

He would go beyond standard scripts to engage with customers as unique individuals—even a simple act like remembering a regular's name, their favorite order, where they like to sit, makes all the difference. He would punctuate each visit to customer tables with pauses for laughter, greetings, and anecdotes, all exchanged with an air of familiar warmth, and every guest was cherished as a long-lost relative in Patrick's world. Today, such things are legends of a day long forgotten. His vision was not merely about exquisite cuisine, but about an experience steeped in genuine respect and individuality.

During lunch I observed Patrick… He taught me the true soul of the hospitality business—to serve, connect and celebrate life's moments, big and small. He taught me the art of sincere and loving hospitality, where the customer was the most important person for a business—one respected, loved, adored and cherished.

For the past 45 years I have tried to embrace Patrick's world in my own family business. It was not an overnight process, but a journey of continuous growth and improvement and one that our families will continue in the future."

- Carmelo Rago, President, Sorrentino's Restaurant Group

"Patrick was our mentor in the Edmonton restaurant industry.

He was the consummate host who always executed at the very highest level in his restaurant! He passionately committed to representing all of us for the benefit of our industry—greatly respected by all. Truly a wonderful guy!!!"

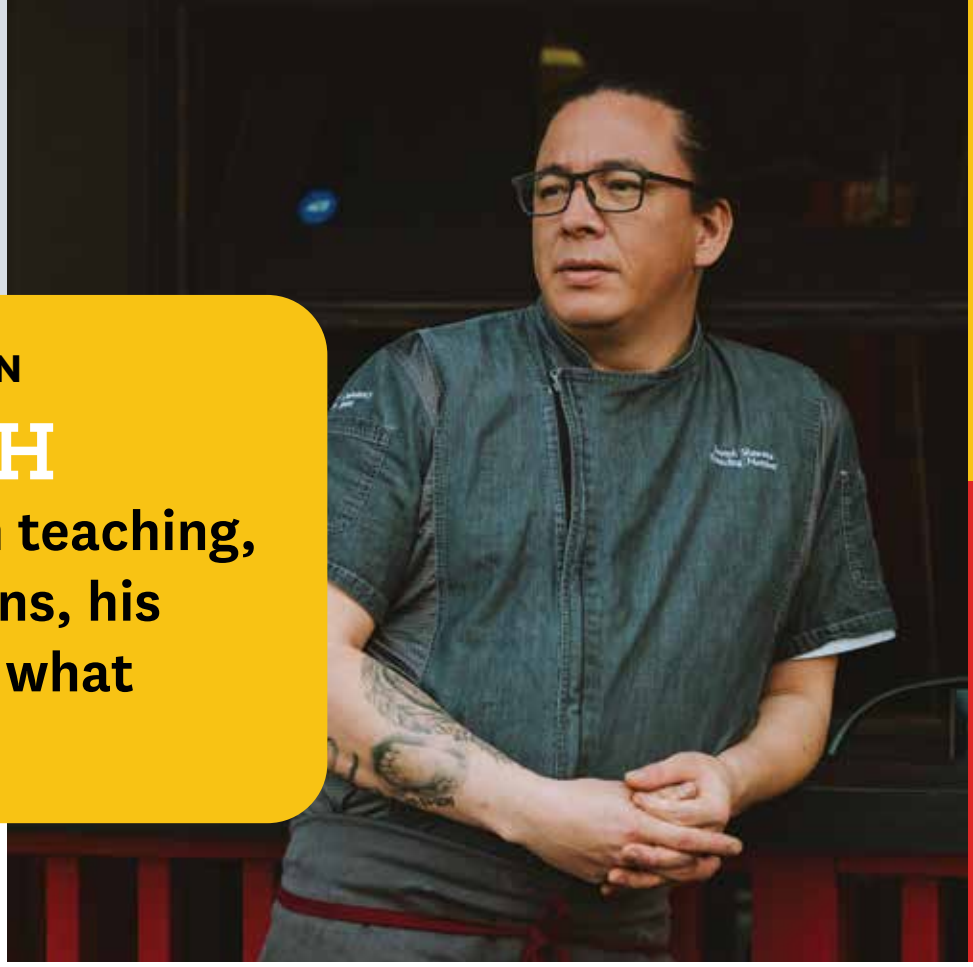
- Barry Arndt, Chair, ZZA Hospitality Group

"Patrick Saurette has to be one of the most professional, inspirational and influential business owners I have come across in my career. From the first moment you hear his booming, charming voice, to when you see the tall man with silver hair, you feel taken care of and heard, and you can trust that he knows exactly what he is doing.

He has been a voice of reason and leadership in the hospitality industry and is known for his commitment to quality and his exemplary treatment of his staff, his contemporaries in the industry and his customers. He is a true supporter of using local suppliers and farmers and has a strong commitment to quality food, wine and service.

He has inspired me (and many others) to become a stronger voice for our industry to government, media and most importantly for my staff and others in the restaurant industry. Patrick will be truly missed as a representative of Alberta for Restaurants Canada, as well as a professional in the Alberta hospitality industry."

- Leslie Echino, Owner & Operator, Annabelle's Kitchen and Bar Annabelle



THE CONVERSATION

CHEF JOSEPH SHAWANA on teaching, culinary competitions, his next big swing, and what matters most

Having recently judged the Garland Canada Culinary Competition, and closed out the winter semester at Centennial College where he is Indigenous Culinary Advisor, Chef Joseph is moving into the summer season, but he's not thinking about vacation. We were fortunate to grab a little time in between classes, feast preparations and planning for his next, very big venture.



MM Could you tell us a little about the Indigenous culinary program at Centennial and your role as culinary advisor?

Chef Joseph Shawana: *I teach anywhere between three and four classes each semester and ultimately, I'm trying to tell the Indigenous true history of Canada through a culinary lens, so to speak. Everything from teaching the traditional stories of The Three Sisters, to sweetgrass braiding, to tanning hides, to using 100 per cent of the animal for various purposes— and not just culinary uses, but also for clothing, tools, housing, and so forth. This Indigenous knowledge sharing that I do daily, I'm teaching to students who are newcomers. I figured it was the best way to show students who come to Canada, sometimes from the other side of the world, what and who Indigenous people are, rather than have them learn a version of that through the media. For many of them, this will be their first time seeing and meeting with an Indigenous person, so it's very important to me to give them that experience directly.*

For a lot of these students, this is their first time away from their home, away from their country, and in Canada itself. So, I want to teach these students on a more personal level. For example, I went to Day School when I was a kid and a lot of them have never heard of residential schools or understand what that concept was and what they tried to do. They're very eager, in a very positive way, to learn the true history of Indigenous people in Canada, and I'm very fortunate to be able to teach it through a culinary lens.

MM How do students arriving in Canada for the first time receive this knowledge differently than you know, a Canadian-born student? What's the difference in terms of their response?

JS: *They're more perceptive to it, right? If you're born and raised in North America, you've been taught a certain curriculum in school on Indigenous people throughout Turtle Island, and that's the concept you go with throughout your entire life.*

Newcomers who come into my classroom or who just meet me in the hallway get to hear the story of where I come from—my history and the true history of the territory where I'm from—not just what they read in a book or read in their citizenship test or something someone else has told them. It's actually told through the lens of an Indigenous chef and Indigenous person.

Has this approach been more gratifying for you?

JS: *For me, it's been humbling. It's allowed me to open up more. My wife has really peeled back the onion on me over the years, so to speak. She's really helped me open up and let my voice be heard. Talking to the students is also helping me a lot more—basically because I don't know them. I like to hear their stories and where they come from as well.*

On the first day of class, I always tell them I would love it if they could speak their own language because it would allow me to better understand where they're coming from as individuals. Their sense of humour and their personality are shown through their language. I also tell them that, unfortunately for me, we lost our language. We're slowly trying to retain it and reclaim it. I was born around it, and I can understand it, but to openly speak it is difficult for me unless I'm around a fluent speaker.

I try and make those kinds of connections with the students and then they open up more and they're more themselves in the classroom, which brings in a more fun environment. More humility and more understanding to counter the industrial education sector.

What's your vision for Indigenous culinary education? Where do you want to see it go?

JS: *I would love to see an Indigenous culinary and foodways education course in every single college, post-secondary school and trade school—for culinary or accounting or any subject—and see an Indigenous perspective and our ways of learning.*

Our knowledge was never written down. It was always passed through storytelling, and it was up to the individual who received that information to interpret it and then take back what they needed to help them in life. And that's the way I teach too. Essentially, I share my version or interpretation of the curriculum for that day and they're very receptive and I think more reflective when they're taught that way. I'm not saying that the way that we're teaching now is bad, but everybody has their own method to get their information across. For me, it's more through storytelling and it's more through knowledge sharing.

It's very important for an individual like me or another Indigenous person who's representing their field to have a space to teach the way we teach and the way we were taught.

So, I think it's very important to have an Indigenous voice in the education field to focus on each specific area. I focus on culinary and Indigenous foods, and there should be an Indigenous chef in every single culinary program across the country representing each region. For example, I'm part of the Three Fires Confederacy, which is the Odawas, the Potawatomis and the Ojibwes, and together we encompass most of the Great Lakes, so I try to teach what I know and what I've been told about our food system within the Great Lakes area. So ideally there should be a West Coast Indigenous chef focused on West Coast Indigenous foods and others representing the East, the North and everywhere in between. Every province and territory should have their specific cuisine represented in schools across the country.

> Our knowledge was never written down. It was always passed through storytelling, and it was up to the individual who received that information to interpret it and then take back what they needed to help them in life."

Have Indigenous culinary courses become more popular since you've been teaching?

JS: *Yes. There's been a lot of post-secondary schools and colleges with culinary schools that are trying to make headway in Indigenous foods, and it's very difficult. Like, people always ask me to explain what Indigenous food is, and I don't even have an answer for them, right? Indigenous food encompasses all the tribes, and all the communities everywhere across the country and you're trying to define all of that in one paragraph? It's impossible.*

Each of us, as Indigenous chefs, have our own knowledge we want to share and our own way of how we want to teach and share it. So, there's been a huge demand and want for Indigenous food in these culinary schools, which is very good, but in order to make that happen I think we have to do this right, with the best possible representation.

What types of students are seeking out knowledge and education on Indigenous foods and cuisine?

JS: *The students who are really seeking it are the ones that are really focused on a specific niche or area of culinary. So, there's French, Italian, Mandarin, Cantonese—there's a whole slew of cuisines, but the students who are asking for this knowledge are the ones who are very centred in what they want to do and focus on in their careers. They can already envision themselves being a chef and, after 20 years of taking command of a kitchen, running their own restaurant and putting what they learned over those 20 years to work for themselves.*

There are also a lot of newcomers. Centennial is an international school, so we have international communities and individuals who are very open-minded to Indigenous foods because they don't even know what wild rice is. We have students who try to cook wild rice the way they would cook basmati rice, but it's nowhere near the same. It takes longer and you need more liquid, more patience and time to get it right or it just turns into mush. I always tell them you have to understand your ingredients first before you can even start cooking with them. Indigenous foods are land-based foods, and you can't consume too much at one given time. You have to space it out. For example, you can't drink cedar tea every single day or it'll upset your stomach. These foods are meant to nourish us, more so than commercial foods, but we have to take them in moderation. We have to understand the quality of the ingredients, their history, how they're harvested, processed and served.

MM You have seen significant change and growth in the Indigenous culinary scene. What are you most excited about?

JS: *We're making headway here at Centennial. I can't say too much about what we're planning just yet, but it will be the first initiative of its kind in Canada, if not North America, for culinary students. I'm very excited for that.*

Outside of the realm of teaching, I'm looking at spaces now to open a new restaurant here in Toronto with a chef-partner of mine, Mark De Passorio—a Michelin Star-quality Indigenous restaurant. He already has two Michelin Stars from France, so he knows what he's doing, and I know I'm ready for that level of dedication and patience, so we need to get it done.

He's on the same page as I am—let's find a spot where we both feel comfortable and that really welcomes people in before they even enter the restaurant. It's a very specific thing we're looking for and it has to be. We're putting a lot of time and money into it.

I'm also excited to focus a little more on myself and spend more time with my wife and son and our families. Over the past few years, we haven't really been able to do that because we were running the restaurant up North.

I'm also glad to see the return of our Full Moon Feasts at the College. We had them when I started here, but COVID put a nail in it. We recently relaunched it and we're celebrating the Bear Moon tonight. We talk about the spiritual meaning behind it and the foods we're going to serve. Chef Rodney Bowers and I plan the menu and students who want to learn about the Indigenous foods we're making and the stories behind them come in and help. They get that experience and help with the front of house and develop a non-alcoholic drink. Our Elder in residence also comes and speaks to the meaning of that moon sharing knowledge with the group.

MM Who attends the dinner?

JS: *It's open to all the students free of cost, and if there are any seats left, faculty and people from within the community are more than welcome to join. It's a very informative dinner series and it's something that's close to my heart because my wife and son always come to support me. My son comes into the kitchen, and he helps with plating and doing*



the finishing touches. He just turned nine and is always very eager to help in the kitchen. He actually got to cook in Paris, France last year. I made up the dish—we made a wild rice pasta with really fresh chanterelles and finished off with a fried sage—but he did everything. He ground the flour from the wild rice, he made the whole pasta. He rolled it. He cut it. He blanched it. He fried the mushrooms. I want to say that he's probably the first eight-year-old who has ever cooked in École Ducasse at that kind of level.

MM Does he want to be a chef?

JS: *He really liked it, but he's still at a young age. I do think he'll actually be a chef because he has that level of precision and that level of attention to detail—he notices everything—but it's all up to him.*

MM There have been voices suggesting that fine dining is on the decline, yet you've chosen to go with your gut on your new concept. What gives you faith?

JS: *Oh, it's one hundred percent down, but the restaurant industry has always been unpredictable, even before COVID. I tend to go with whatever my gut is telling me because it's more accurate than any data that's out there.*

It's very difficult, but as long as you have the dedication and patience, you know what you're doing is right, and you have that essence you need to be a restaurateur, then, once you get there, it's the most rewarding thing ever. The restaurant business is very unpredictable. It goes up and it goes down and you can close in a heartbeat, but to have something that's successful, that's up and running, is like nothing else.

The people who do well at it have that drive and dedication. If you understand what the industry is, how it behaves, and how it's marketed, I think you will do very well.

MM You were an esteemed judge at this year's Garland Culinary Competition. Why did you choose to participate and what do you appreciate about competition in the culinary world?

JS: *From an audience standpoint, you're seeing these chefs on stage battle it out against each other and that's exactly how it is every single night of our lives when we're on the line working in the kitchen. It's very unpredictable. It's very precise. It's very demanding. That's exactly what competitions bring—especially one like Garland that's so open on stage where everybody can see you cooking. They can see your excellence and they can see your mistakes. It's a very high-stakes, demanding thing to participate in and it brings out the best and the worst in people.*

But, at the end of the day, it brings a sense of community back to the restaurant industry, right? There may be millions of restaurants in the world, but it's such a tight community and

such a small world because we all know somebody who knows somebody. It's also a very supportive community and I like to support as much as I possibly can. Judging the Garland Canada Competition wasn't something I ever thought I'd be doing, but it's something I'm very happy to have taken on and I'm very honoured to have been part of it because I know some great chefs that have gone through the competition itself and they have made a name for themselves.

> At the end of the day, it brings a sense of community back to the restaurant industry, right? There may be millions of restaurants in the world, but it's such a tight community and such a small world because we all know somebody who knows somebody."

MM Have you judged other culinary competitions?

JS: *Nothing to this standard or at this level. I've judged closed-door competitions in the past and I really like it because I get to be really open and honest.*

Competitors are not getting judged by the audience, but by the judge's palate, the judge's perception of your dish and how well you presented yourself in the kitchen. It's a very individualized thing to go through.

MM Have you ever competed yourself?

JS: *I have, but it's not for me. Everybody's better at something than somebody else, right? I have 24 students in my class, and I always tell them, "I could give 24 of the world's best chefs the same recipe and they'll come back with 24 different dishes." It's very individualized, and I'm most interested in seeing what's left on people's plates at the end of their meal. Personally, I don't like to put myself above anybody else. I have won a couple of competitions, and the praise and that pedestal are not for me. That's just my own personality; I like to remain humble. I like to remember that anything I have in this world can be taken away from me within a minute, right? In order for me to maintain my level of professionalism, I need to remain grounded. Ego can get in the way on so many different levels in this industry and that's difficult to deal with.*

MM Do you approach judging more with the mindset of a teacher?

JS: *As a teacher, I'm teaching how to do things in a specific way as the curriculum tells me to do, but as a knowledge sharer, I like to observe what people are doing. If I'm judging something, I'll judge it based on the culinary techniques I've been educated on versus the things that I would do in a kitchen when time is on the line. Culinary competitions are very precise and detail oriented and they have to be. You're being judged not only on how your dish looks, but how it tastes, how the cuts are, how everything is seasoned, whether you seared it properly and to the judges' liking, which also comes into effect. It's all of these technical details that are judged that I like to judge on. I don't like to judge just based on my own personal taste, but I'll always ask those questions: "What was the outcome that you envisioned for this dish?" or, "What are the flavour profiles you wanted to highlight in this dish?" And then I'll judge based on how the chef prepared it and the vision behind it. If it's lacking something the competitor said should be in there, I'll move away from it.*

MM What's next in the national Indigenous culinary scene?

JS: *At Indigenous Culinary of Associated Nations (ICAN), we represent a lot of chefs from across the country and we're really trying to open up doors that haven't been opened before in the culinary and tourism space. So, it's very important that we have the right representation in the right places and the right individuals teaching our future generations.*

Having somebody that is representative to a place where they claim is very important and sets a precedent for how everything is perceived and taught from that moment onward. ICAN is trying to get that right representation into those fields and into those places of employment to ensure we have a voice, and we are breaking more barriers down as we move along.

It's very important not only to me, but also to my board and our executive director that we accomplish our goals that we set out every single year and that we're allowed to speak and tell our truth in everything. We've been there since the inception of ICAN, so we know where we want to take it and how we want to get there. It's a very slow pace, but it's better than no pace at all.

MM Are you seeing more young people, in culinary or other disciplines, stepping into some of the opportunities ICAN is creating?

JS: *Yes. There are a lot of tourism businesses that are focusing on culinary offerings now. With that comes more jobs within our field for Indigenous culinary students. By creating those positions, we're actually creating a better economy for our communities as well as for those individuals. It's important for us to focus on that kind of work, but also important to focus on how we want to teach these individuals to be and thrive in that workplace.*

How we get there is very important. That's why we're taking things slowly, building up our accomplishments and bringing more people into our organization who can represent those territories and provinces across the country.

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POTENTIAL BEYOND BORDERS:

The transformational effect of newcomers on Canadian foodservice is real, and it's our future.

Half of all Canadian restaurants are run by entrepreneurs who arrived as immigrants, and 31 per cent of these owners belong to visible minority groups. These restaurateurs are not just business owners; they are community builders who enrich Canada's cultural mosaic and drive local economies.

As the Canadian foodservice industry struggles under the pressure of more than 78,000 job vacancies, Restaurants Canada is recommending a win-win solution with the potential to narrow the gap and offer newcomers real development and growth opportunities, and a path to self-sufficient permanency.

The Canadian government continues to adjust its immigration policies, and the foodservice industry is paying close attention.

Aggressive federal immigration policies designed to infuse the labour market with newcomers have put pressure on housing, healthcare, and infrastructure, leading to measures like intake caps on international student permits. Despite new Canadians' significant contributions to culture, communities and the economy, public concerns about overpopulation have influenced a more cautious approach.

"The support for immigration in Canada has gone from the highest level of public support for immigration ever in the nation's history to the lowest level of support, within a year," acknowledges Richard Alexander, Restaurants Canada Executive Vice President, Government Relations & Public Affairs. "The pendulum has swung dramatically, and that's being driven primarily by affordability. There's a perception out there that these open permit, closed permit and temporary foreign workers are contributing to the affordable housing crisis. Many of the provinces, economists and special interest groups have been calling on the government to tighten these permits up as well as the international student program. The federal government is resisting because they understand the importance of those labour streams. The reality is that if it wasn't for these people and these programs, the country would probably be in a recession right now."

As the government moves quickly in an attempt to balance the economic benefits of immigration with the capacity to provide adequate public services, Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship was interviewed in June on CBC's Cost of Living with Paul Haavardsrud, where he highlighted a common misapprehension about the immigrant workforce and their contribution to the country: "I think the mental error that we tend to make is to assume that this group of people that are here never become permanent. That's not true. A good chunk of them actually do, and well they should, particularly when you're talking about younger segments of the working population, where there are far less people in the workforce per retiree than there were when I was born. It's a number that should scare all of us. If we want all of the benefits that we're so proud of in Canada, we need people working and paying taxes."



> *"The support for immigration in Canada has gone from the highest level of public support for immigration ever in the nation's history to the lowest level of support, within a year."*
>
> – **Richard Alexander, Restaurants Canada Executive Vice-President, Government Relations & Public Affairs**

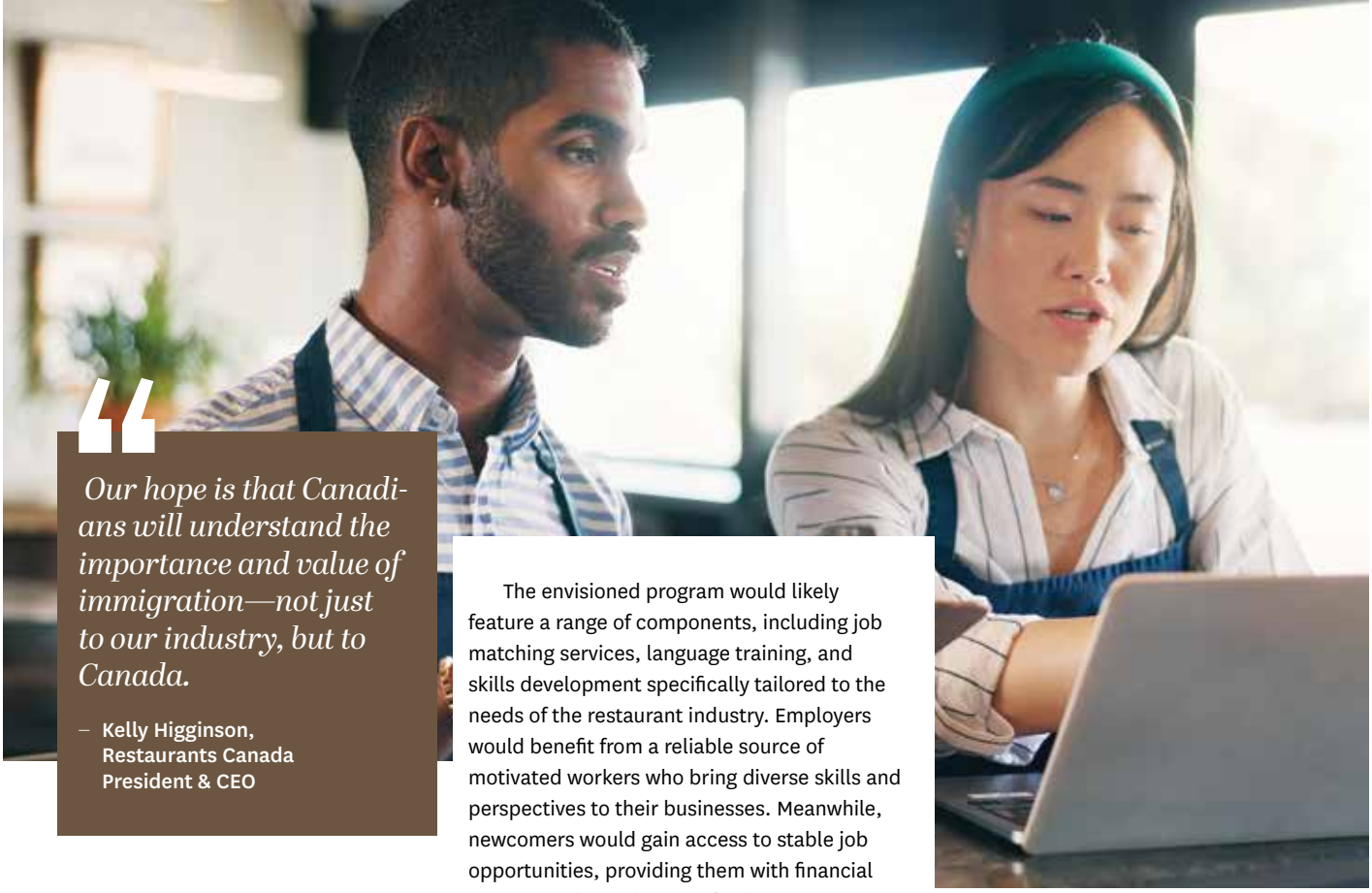
We also need a plan.

While Restaurants Canada believes temporary foreign workers are still essential for tourism operators, remote locations or areas without the population base to support local businesses, Alexander points out that the needed labour pool is already here. "There are about a million open permit workers already in Canada—primarily refugees, asylum seekers and international students—who can work anywhere already. A large percentage of them are unemployed or may be working under the table. They represent a stream of labour our industry can employ."

Restaurants Canada is urging the government to implement a comprehensive program that would match newcomers who are already living in Canada and who have open work permits to employment opportunities in the restaurant industry. These unfilled roles have significantly impacted foodservice operations and service quality, leading to reduced hours, menu limitations, and, in some cases, temporary and permanent closures.

Restaurants Canada's proposal surfaces a solution within arms-reach with the potential to address both the labour shortages in the restaurant industry and the employment and social inclusion needs of newcomers. And, like most great ideas, the blueprint is simple: address industry labour shortages by connecting newcomers with open employment opportunities and support successful integration into the Canadian economic and social community.

This idea didn't spring forth from the desert. Canada has previously run several successful, high-retention programs designed to connect newcomers with employment opportunities, notably the Destination Employment Pilot (2019-2021). This pilot program, which matched newcomers with jobs in the hospitality and tourism industry and provided essential training, demonstrated strong results with positive third-party evaluation leading to a recommendation



> *Our hope is that Canadians will understand the importance and value of immigration—not just to our industry, but to Canada.*
>
> – **Kelly Higginson, Restaurants Canada President & CEO**

to scale it up. The pilot's key components included job-specific, on-site language training, which proved to be cost-effective in comparison with classroom-style language training. While the pilot focused on tourism hospitality, expanding it to the broader restaurant industry could enhance its positive impact.

Newcomers to Canada often face significant barriers when entering the job market. These include language challenges, a lack of Canadian work experience, and limited professional networks. A government-run program, supported by the industry, could provide structured support, helping newcomers gain valuable work experience, improve their language skills, and integrate more seamlessly into Canadian society. This would not only help fill labour gaps but also promote economic and social inclusion, fostering a sense of community and belonging among newcomers. "Our hope is that Canadians will understand the importance and the value of immigration—not just to our industry, but to Canada," Kelly Higginson, Restaurants Canada President and CEO emphasizes. "Because our industry has been set up as the number one employer of youth, we're used to teaching people how to enter the workforce," We generally have a very supportive workplace for newcomers based on our experience with youth."

The envisioned program would likely feature a range of components, including job matching services, language training, and skills development specifically tailored to the needs of the restaurant industry. Employers would benefit from a reliable source of motivated workers who bring diverse skills and perspectives to their businesses. Meanwhile, newcomers would gain access to stable job opportunities, providing them with financial security and a pathway to further career advancement.

The real-world contribution of newcomers to Canada was brought to life in the Association's recent video, Table Talk: Menthe and Couscous, which spotlights the Montreal restaurant and personalizes the vital role newcomers play in the foodservice industry and the local economy. The video highlights the story of the Menthe and Couscous owners who have not only brought authentic North African cuisine to the city and become significant community builders, but who are also killing it with their food. As co-owner Riham Reda says: "Google it. You'll see it's the best couscous in Montreal!"

"Our hope is that Canadians will understand the importance and the value of immigration—not just to our industry, but to Canada," says Higginson. "Our industry offers immediate solutions. Opportunity for an immediate job, immediate settlement and immediate community. All of this, from a settlement perspective, leads to a higher rate of success. There is also real opportunity in our industry for people to move up. About 50 per cent of Denny's and Boston Pizza franchisees are newcomers to this country. These are real success stories. Canada has seen an incredible decline in population growth, and we are going to need immigration to address that."



To learn more, scan the QR code and download Restaurants Canada's Recruiting International Workers toolkit at:

Do you have a personal newcomer story to tell? Restaurants Canada would love to hear it: e: info@restaurantscanada.org



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Canada's first Boston Pizza location was opened in Edmonton, Alberta in 1964 by Gus Agioritis, a Greek immigrant. Since then, the Canadian company has become Canada's number one casual dining brand and has earned a sterling reputation as a Platinum Member of Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies and a Great Place to Work.



Cailin White
Director of National Development, Boston Pizza

With 25 years in the restaurant industry and five years as head of Boston Pizza's national franchising team, Cailin White has long seen the success and value of newcomers to the foodservice industry. "A lot of folks come to Canada looking for the Canadian dream and they want to own a restaurant business," she recalls. "We attract a lot of new Canadians because Boston Pizza is really just such a staple in the Canadian marketplace. We've been around since 1964, and we have almost a cult-like following, especially in Western Canada, where we started."

White believes the Boston Pizza brand and their hiring approach—hire the personality and train the skill—have served them well in finding new talent. "We look for people with leadership and entrepreneurial skills who want to be involved in their community," she shares. "We have really great stories of folks who came to Canada 15 years ago and started working as a dishwasher in a Boston Pizza, who have worked their way up through the business to become a general manager and are moving into ownership."

Of all of the challenges confronting the restaurant industry, White believes labour is the greatest. "It's always been a struggle to find people who are well suited to and want to work in the restaurant industry, and during COVID we saw a lot of talent leave. In tourism and remote and smaller communities, operators really rely on newcomers and temporary foreign worker programs. It works for both parties: the new Canadians seeking employment as a stepping stone to obtaining permanent residency and the business owners because newcomers are often very loyal, goal driven and bring really diverse skill sets, ideas and creativity. I think it's really a win-win."

White has also noted a difference in newcomers' approach to their roles at Boston Pizza, not least of which is a more positive perception of the foodservice industry and the advancement opportunities it offers. "We meet people who come to us with specific education in hospitality and hotel and restaurant management and that's their dream and their goal. Those who come to us through the temporary foreign worker program are also very passionate about hospitality and the restaurant world, and oftentimes, they will stay with us for years."

The full effects of increased restrictions on newcomer talent sources are yet to be seen, but White is certain it will make operating more difficult. "A lot of businesses rely on the program and the newcomer labour force, and it will have a negative impact for sure. We continue to look for different and creative ways to attract employees to Boston Pizza, but newcomer programs have been successful and certainly took the edge off."



Anil Kapur
Boston Pizza Franchisee

Anil Kapur is a serial franchisee with an unapologetic passion for the Boston Pizza brand. At one time, he owned 16 Boston Pizza restaurants, and these days he remains involved in 10.

Kapur earned his undergraduate degree and Masters in hotel and restaurant management in India, working for Oberoi Hotels. Before he turned 25, he emigrated to Saudi Arabia where he franchised for several U.S. chains, including a burger joint and Chinese, Indian and Italian restaurants. His passion for hospitality led him to become a professional chef and ice carver, which allowed him to travel the world before coming to Canada in 1989, at which point he again immersed himself in the franchise world.

Initially, Kapur worked with several companies including Domino's Pizza, where he became Operating Partner, and then on to PepsiCo, working with Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and KFC, where he was decorated number one GM in the world. Having "learned the Canadian way of doing business", Kapur had his sights set on Boston Pizza. "I knew Boston Pizza was an amazing franchise out West—I knew what they were doing and what they were going to do. So, in 1999, I approached them and became one of the first franchisees to open a Boston Pizza in Ontario, on Queen Street in Brampton. It was a big, huge success because



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I brought a lot of knowledge and experience from different concepts—it's an amazing concept. If you're passionate about hospitality and you have dreams of enjoying your life and your work, there's no other concept better than Boston Pizza. It's a big testament to Boston Pizza that I brought my son into the business. That should tell you how much I love it."

At the peak of his business, Kapur employed 1,100 people in his restaurants, and an estimated 50-60 per cent were newcomers. "You cannot get into hospitality and be successful without passion. If you're looking at the clock, this is not the game for you. If you're just looking for a paycheque, this is not the game for you. Many young Canadians shy away from hospitality. They don't like the long hours, and working weekends. The industry needs people who really want to be here—who love hospitality, meeting people, and looking after people. The immigrants I hire are more than willing to do it because they come in looking at the long-term picture and see that this will be a good opportunity for them."

As a business owner and an immigrant himself, Kapur believes immigration is the only way forward to address the labour gap. "Look, my kids are in their early thirties, and they're not married yet, let alone having kids. So where are you going to get enough people to work? We need quality immigrants, so we need to refresh the program, get the right people with the right skills in who want to work and make it happen. Without immigrants, we will not be able to cope—our population just doesn't support the level of productivity we need."

The first Denny's opened in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1970. As one of the world's most iconic and beloved full-service family restaurants, Denny's has a well-known reputation for its efficient level of service and great guest experience. With many locations open 24/7, Denny's relies on new Canadians to help provide essential new growth opportunities, not only for the brand but also within its organizational structure.



Rakesh Nanda
Director of Operations, Denny's

"For them, it's a life-changing opportunity," Nanda says. "For us, it's a nightmare without them."

As Director of Operations, Rakesh Nanda is responsible for over 30 Denny's locations across the Canadian prairies. He begins by acknowledging the importance of newcomers, who not only hold vital positions but also come with several years of experience and a well-respected qualification in culinary or the hospitality industry. "The level of accountability and the operations have improved drastically," Nanda asserts. "Before it was taking 30 minutes for the food to be served - now it's coming out in 10. Our guests are happier, which is positively reflected in our sales and costs, resulting in each restaurant working more efficiently. This in turn motivates team members to stay with us for longer, forging and developing a long-term career within the industry."

But like Boston Pizza, Denny's is expecting to be negatively impacted by the increased restrictions on newcomer talent sources. Nanda has already identified a significant and unexplained slowdown in the processing time for Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) approvals. "The TFW program has been a great help in keeping our restaurants operating, until recently. Up to December 2023, LMIAs had shorter processing timelines. While we are consistently adjusting and updating our practices to accurately adhere to the application process, I still have 45 applications waiting over six months for approval" he advises. "There is no explanation—we're just told they're in the queue. Important and valued team members are just sitting at home, not allowed to work, and we have no idea when their LMIAs will be processed."

With no resolution forthcoming from the government and roughly 200 people working with Denny's in danger of being affected by changes in procedure, the number of employees without income is likely to grow in the not-too-distant future. This Kafkaesque situation adds layers of frustration to an already urgent situation for restaurants. "We are supporting them as much as we possibly can. We run restaurants, so the least we can do is feed them and reassure them. But now they're at home suffering, with the restaurants suffering too, and we don't know what to do."

"We have so many success stories from team members who started with us through the TFW program and are now with Denny's for over 15, 20 years or even longer. They have moved into senior management levels within the organization, utilizing their unique perspective to influence and enact positive brand changes along the way." Nanda shares. "I also know of team members who originally only planned to stay for a limited time to gain better industry experience. However, having witnessed the vast career opportunities available, they decided to settle and raise their families in their new hometowns. They work hard to contribute to a better future, not only for themselves but for everyone within their local communities, becoming an integral, beloved, and reliable part of their small town neighborhoods and cities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, or Manitoba."

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With Jeff Doucette, General Manager, Field Agent Canada

In the shifting landscape of customer satisfaction, Jeff Doucette, General Manager of Field Agent Canada, is an expert.

In this wide-ranging interview, Jeff shares valuable insights into understanding and measuring customer experience, key findings from Field Agent's ***"State of Customer Experience in Canada" report****, and the unique preferences of Generation Z, a demographic reshaping the commercial sphere with their digital fluency and demand for authenticity. He also gives some sage advice on navigating the intricacies of living in a review-driven culture, where customer feedback holds unprecedented power in influencing business strategies.*

UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND BRAND EXPECTATION...

MM "Customer experience" is a term that's thrown around on the daily in the foodservice industry. What does it really mean, and why is it so important?

Jeff Doucette: *We're also hearing a lot about "CX", which seems to be the trendy thing to call it now, but to me it's all the touch points that a customer or even a potential customer has with your business. So, you know, it could be things outside of your business that may turn them away before they even get in the door, like the cleanliness of the parking lot, a line outside the door or online ratings and reviews. The most important factor in customer experience is whether your brand and the experience you give your customers line up, and whether or not your promise is being fulfilled.*

If you take movie theatres—the customer experience expectation is probably a much narrower band. It's going to smell like popcorn, you hope that the line is short, the theatre is the right temperature, the show has good sound, and the seat is comfortable. You know what it is and it's generally consistent. But in the restaurant industry, you have white tablecloth dining on one end of the spectrum and a hot dog vendor on the other, so customer experience points are different, and the expectation is different.

MM Right, but how do you communicate and ultimately deliver within that broad spectrum?

JD: *It's about the relative value. A seven-dollar shawarma at a food cart on the side of the street might be a much better customer experience than a hundred-dollar meal in a restaurant, because it isn't being judged the same way. Your customer experience is related to your brand promise, big or small, and your ability to deliver against that yardstick.*

MM How much does that alignment between your brand promise matter?

JD: *I think it matters a ton because consumers are coming in with a preconceived notion of what they're going to get. As a business owner, you've created that expectation from the name of your restaurant to the look and location, and your menu and price point—that's the promise. Overpromising and underdelivering is the problem.*

Most franchisors, for example, create a brand with an array of clear, specific operational and service principles that need to be lived up to in order to maintain that brand, and they're pretty good at setting up that rigor to meet the expectations they set and training staff on those elements. They also tend not to tolerate franchisees that operate outside of those ideals.

Independent restaurants, on the other hand, might not always formalize the balance between the expectation and the brand. They may not think about what it means to come to their pub and what that experience is like and should be like. When you don't have clear expectations, you have a gap in the customer experience, and that's where services like a mystery shop can come in really handy. It can tell you whether or not you lived up to or fell short of your promise, and what you need to fix to get there.



MEASURING SUCCESS...

MM You're talking about the currency of experience, essentially, right? The negative currency would be disappointment and the positive would be surprise and/or delight, with satisfaction sitting in the middle. What are the key areas of Field Agent's mystery shop assessment and what can operators learn from them?

JD: *We measure using up to 12 satisfaction variables woven into our surveys—it's a little like the dials on an old stereo in that the settings are different depending on the restaurant brand. If you have really good food and bad service, you will get a net negative score, just as you will if you have great service and bad food. It all comes down to the food and service in restaurants, because the alternative is eating at home. So, if I'm going to a restaurant and paying more for the same food, I had better be getting something over and above, which is where the service element becomes very important. It's really not rocket science, but it does come down to very well-known, measurable principles. I think, to their detriment, a lot of businesses don't measure it because maybe they don't want to know the answer.*

We sometimes see a version of this with Field Agent clients. We recently finished a program for a customer and, as the results come in from a mystery shop, they're available on our client dashboard. I got a call from our client, and they were upset because they couldn't understand the results. They asked us to mystery shop their dine-in experience, but they were seeing takeout on the receipts. Well, it was because the staff were serving dine-in meals in takeout containers. So, the triangulation mystery shops provide can surface unexpected problems in a business. Even if you only have one restaurant, you can't be there 24 hours a day. You're not always seeing what's happening when you're not there.

This type of feedback gives you that reality check against your own expectations, so something like a mystery shop could be seen as a cost or it could be seen as an investment in the brand to make sure that you're living up to the brand promise.

MM How often does it happen that a mystery shop uncovers unforeseen problems in a restaurant business?

JD: *Quite frequently, actually. The free-form commentary at the end of the mystery shop survey can be particularly insightful. We ask mystery shoppers to respond to the question: "If you owned this restaurant, what would you want to know based on your experience here today?" You can get a lot of really awesome feedback this way—negative and positive—because mystery shoppers, as customers, are seeing what's happening from a different angle. People who are seated are seeing a whole other layer of what's happening in that restaurant.*

MM Do you have any advice as to how negative feedback should be shared and/or implemented?

JD: *It's definitely not the Gordon Ramsay approach of throwing things around the kitchen. With mystery shops, operators receive a photo of the receipt, so they can often see who the server was and trace it back to an individual staff member and repeat mystery shops will show if a restaurant's problems are clustered around a single person. But even then, that feedback should be approached as an opportunity to talk to the whole team about the expectation on a particular point as it relates to the brand. In the consumer-packaged goods industry, you live by the brand, and you want a brand that instantly conjures up the idea of what it should mean. At an individual restaurant level, the coaching for most things that will pop up in our mystery shop, shouldn't be, "Rebecca did this wrong, so I'm going to talk to Rebecca." It should be more like, "Hey team, we had a mystery shop recently and here's the feedback and a reminder that our goal is to visit each customer at their table within a minute of them sitting down." So, here's the expectation, this is what our brand means, and this is how we deliver it. Ideally, it's a teachable moment for the whole staff and an opportunity for the management to reinforce the expectation for the whole team.*

MM Are there ways operators can integrate quality assurance programs like mystery shops into their restaurants as a positive aspect of the culture?

JD: *Mystery shop programs are also a recognition opportunity for managers to acknowledge great service or results and show staff some appreciation. It could even be as simple as a $10 gift card. Regular mystery shops provide owners and managers with an objective*



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[1] Egg Consumption Omnibus, May 2023

opinion that they can have a conversation with their team about, good or bad. It all comes down to the idea that what gets measured, gets done correctly.

Quality assurance around customer experience builds some autonomy and pride in the team, that they can handle it and that they know what they're doing. This is so important. There are companies who micro-script every aspect of their jobs, and who wants to work in an environment where a machine is beeping at you every four minutes to go check the washroom? You don't have to make it so simple and so…silly. You just want to reinforce the brand promise.

THE "STATE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN CANADA" REPORT…

MM At RC Show 2024, Field Agent presented a custom research report, "State of Customer Experience in Canada." Did you prepare it specifically for the show audience?

JD: *This was a specific report we pulled together for RC Show where we tried to think about what's important in the industry and provide insights that we were able to glean by using a tool like Field Agent. We did a two-stage survey looking at what's happening in the restaurant industry generally to form an opinion base. We surveyed 1,000 people about their general interactions with foodservice and talked to 1,000 respondents after they'd visited a restaurant on their own—where we weren't sending them in to do a mystery shop. We wanted to understand the current state of customer experience, so it was a mix of an opinion-style survey and a trends survey, with the additional value of opinion data gleaned from the experiences of 1,000 actual restaurant visits over a week or so.*

MM Did you collect the data with the Field Agent system?

JD: *Field Agent is designed as a data collection tool. It's a simple app, but it allows us to program surveys and push them out to our team of almost 300,000 field agents in Canada. We guide them through a particular survey across their whole experience. It could be an in-home survey you can answer while you're watching TV, which is the method we used for the trends aspect of the report, or it could be an actual restaurant visit where we stage people through the experience. We'll ask them to answer certain questions as they're eating their meal, and we'll ask for a photo of their meal and of their receipt. We'll ask if they visited the washroom and whether it was stocked and clean. Information is collected on the app throughout the whole experience, and that information is sent back to our team and compiled on our dashboard.*



Customers in our Mystery Shop Program can see it happen online, in near real-time. We also offer custom scorecarding, where Field Agent generates a scorecard and notifies the management team or whoever is designated to receive the results right after the mystery shop is completed.

MM Are there any other aspects of customer experience that can be measured?

JD: *You can also use mystery shops as front-end quality assurance testing, which is really interesting. We worked with a 300-store operator on a new product launch and were able to identify challenges in the execution coming right off the line. We do a lot of programs where we go out in the first day or two of a launch to see what the food is like coming off the line and provide feedback on any operational issues so they can be quickly identified and resolved. In this case, the company called a network-wide Zoom meeting to walk every restaurant manager through the process in order to fix it.*

For new products or limited time offers, you have such a short amount of time to identify and address problems before your brand is impacted. This customer experience feedback is important because it's focused on a critical, time-sensitive investment.

MM Can you share a few key customer service takeaways from your report?

JD: *In the QSR space, with Dine-In customers we saw that there's a customer expectation that, from the point they park their car to when they walk to the door, come inside the restaurant and interact with staff, they want a quicker and friendlier experience than what they're getting. Going through the drive-through was getting better scores than actually going into the restaurant, and that seems like a miss. The full customer experience should happen within the building. When you have someone inside your space, you have an opportunity to give them the full brand experience, and the drive-through should be the "Coles Notes" of that experience.*

My advice would be that if the experience of going and sitting down in your restaurant is not a part of your brand you want to perpet-

uate, close your dining rooms. If you're not living up to your brand standard inside your building, you're actually detracting from your brand, and you're losing business.

We also learned that, when customers come into restaurants, they're often unhappy with the level of cleanliness they're seeing. So, if your dining room is slow, the staff aren't engaged, and the restaurant isn't that clean, why would your customers keep coming inside?

Even though dine-in customers might be a smaller percentage of your business, how many restaurants can afford to lose those people outright? If you take that volume out of the mix, is your restaurant still profitable? You have to balance those things, and there are lots of businesses out there that are really focused on drive-through and do it really well. Even if you maintain a small space, it still needs to live up to your promise.



GENERATION Z

MM Have you noticed any differences in terms of customer experience expectation with Gen Z?

***JD:** Yeah. They're looking for "better everything", which is very interesting. They're tougher on most of the metrics we put out there as well as on mystery shops. This could be tied to this generation's technology cycle, with better and faster iPhones and other technologies that are improving and expanding at such an escalated pace—paying the same, but expecting more.*

They also value unique, shareable experiences and are more likely to read and leave a review and do a TikTok review. Gen Z are definitely more empowered to share their opinions. They've been encouraged from a very young age to be vocal and to express their opinions and be more present in the moment, and they're willing to share their experience and what they think. The whole concept of influence is born out of that.

MM Have you encountered any restaurants that do a particularly great job of connecting with Gen Z?

***JD:** You know, there's a restaurant here in Calgary that sells only chicken fingers. It's called Strip Joint Chicken. You go in there and it's decorated with neon, they have a pole, and they're edgy with how they like to name their dishes. They're also open late and the service is great because they're catering to and directly targeting that crowd.*

Outside of foodservice, it's common for brands to focus specifically on a particular demographic, but you don't see that as much with restaurants. It's more like, "We're going to be a burger joint, but we also have a brew bar..." I don't think it's a bad thing to have a restaurant where Boomers wouldn't be caught dead but is great for Gen Zs.

OPERATING IN A REVIEW CULTURE...

MM Restaurants have been living in a review culture for a long time. What can a service like a mystery shop do that online reviews can't?

***JD:** Most negative online reviews are left by people who are pissed off, and restaurants may only have a few reviews because they're hard to gather. You might only have seven reviews for your restaurant and four of them are from people who had issues right?*

We bring a consistent program that brings a restaurant's reviews to up to 50 or more current reviews. We won't influence the review—if the service or the food is bad, it's bad. Restaurants have to be willing to live with the honest review. But, what we will do, is get the restaurant that steady stream of thorough reviews. It's not just "Five stars—Love this place!", it's going to be a minimum 30-word review with information that is helpful for the next customer and helps with their SEO.

Restaurants shouldn't worry about fixing bad reviews, but about maintaining a consistent flow of reviews that keep them fresh, with an adequate amount of information. That's how people are making decisions.

FIELD AGENT

FIELD AGENT IS A RESTAURANTS CANADA PREFERRED PARTNER.

To learn more about their mystery shopping programs for Restaurants Canada members and to download their State of Customer Experience in Canada FREE, please visit:

fieldagentcanada.com/rc

Food for Thought

American Express Canada & Square bring restaurateurs together to share their big opportunities for growth.



Culinary Creators Project panelists from left to right: Karisa Marra (moderator), Patrick Kriss, Craig Harding, Nicki Laborie and Derek Wasser

At the end of March, Toronto's culinary landscape witnessed an extraordinary evening brimming with advice, insights, and exclusive, curated dishes at the Steam Whistle Brewery in Toronto. The Culinary Creators Project is a remarkable gathering designed to bring the hospitality industry together to encourage collaboration and explore new ideas and relationships. The event showcased American Express® and Square's pivotal roles as the key ingredients to success for restaurateurs.

The Culinary Creators Project, presented by American Express and Square, is a platform that provided a space for hospitality leaders and luminaries to get to know their community, enjoy incredible chef-curated bites and gain valuable insights from a panel of four of Toronto's top chefs and restaurateurs: *Feast Forward: A Recipe for Restaurant Growth in 2024*.

Moderated by Karisa Marra, Head of Sales at Square Canada, the panel featured Patrick Kriss, chef and founder of Alo Food Group; Craig Harding, founder and culinary director of Bar Prima, La Palma and Constantine, and co-host of Cooking Italy; Nicki Laborie, founder and owner of Reyna Hospitality Group; and Derek Wasser, Chief Operating Officer of The Food Dudes. These influential local chefs illuminated the path to uncovering new growth opportunities, streamlining restaurant operations, and diversifying and amplifying their brands.

Here's what they had to share:

Efficiency & Automation

The hospitality industry is embracing cloud-based technologies to streamline operations and focus on core priorities, and the panelists are no exception to the trend. This includes apps for managing inventory and invoices, along with rapid, integrated payment systems. Interestingly, despite the hype, for these operators, the focus is more on automating tasks rather than introducing robotics. "We've suffered more in the last six months than we did during COVID," acknowledged Nicki Laborie, highlighting the sector's ongoing challenges. Yet, the heart of hospitality remains unchanged. As Laborie put it, "The hospitality business is all about love, and robots can't do love."

American Express and Square make running a restaurant smoother to enable chefs/owners to actualize their restaurant aspirations how they want and no matter where they are on their journey. Karisa Marra noted how technology, when used wisely, can support the essential human element in hospitality. "While people often think automation means cutting staff, many restaurant managers believe it actually benefits employees by freeing them from repetitive tasks, allowing them to focus on more important aspects of the business." In person or online, American Express and Square can help restaurants take all kinds of payments quickly and securely, and provide access to helpful tools and personalized support to keep businesses growing.

Scaling & Diversification

Scaling a restaurant group is both an art and a science, often requiring a mix of gut instinct, opportunity analysis, and strategic planning. Nicki Laborie shared her approach: "In terms of knowing when to scale, I've always used my gut and good opportunities. I've always been taught to not miss an opportunity; to analyze it thoroughly and, if it works, try and make it happen." Counselling caution, Laborie highlights the importance of ensuring the stability and success of existing operations before expanding further.

Patrick Kriss offered a slightly different perspective, emphasizing the need to push boundaries: "If you're sitting on two restaurants and you feel comfortable and you feel you've got it made, it's time to build another one. I think you've got to push yourself and be uncomfortable… If you're uncomfortable, it means you're on point." He also stresses the value of scaling for team development, a point





Derek Wasser expands on: "By continuing to evolve and grow and by opening a restaurant that might make you suddenly uncomfortable or that you're scraping together the money for, or that you think is a bit rushed, you're creating so much growth and development for your team, which ultimately is a really organic growth cycle for a hospitality company."

Craig Harding adds another layer to the discussion, highlighting diversification opportunities. "We're also branching out and going to our customers in their home, in venues – that's been very important for us." Laborie concurs, recognizing the profitability of events: "Events have great margins. I have a very active events team that sells."

"It just has to come out of this weird place in your soul," Harding admits. There may not be a one-size-fits-all playbook for scaling and diversification in the restaurant industry; however, the combination of strategic planning, team development, and seizing diversification opportunities can create a promising growth trajectory for restaurants.

Branding & Marketing

Effective branding and marketing are key to attracting and keeping customers in the hyper-competitive restaurant industry, the panel agrees, and should prioritize authenticity and consistency. Laborie also notes that revisiting old-school strategies can be a powerful way to reconnect with customers and boost engagement: "We've brought back promotions—we're bringing back all of the marketing we used to do when we first opened."

Kriss admits there's an urgency to learn and do more to promote his restaurant group, especially as his business grows: "We need to introduce ourselves to new customers because we have catering, and then we have more restaurants and new restaurants, so for the last year we've been putting a lot of effort into it." He also notes that more reticent operators (like himself) need to step outside their comfort zone to ensure the success of their brand.

Harding points to truth and clarity as key components of successful marketing: "I think it's about telling a really authentic story. You've got to be honest from the get-go. If you're not telling a story about your group or your restaurant that's really tight and concise, people get confused."

"We've always kept our brand very strong and very consistent," says Laborie, who is a fan of brand continuity. "I'm very proud of the Reyna brand. I love what we've done with it, and it's really grown and attracted a lot of people to our restaurants because of all those little details you keep in your branding and marketing across the board."

Derek Wasser from The Food Dudes recalls their early dedication to brand and content creation: "There was always a huge drive to create content for parties through events we threw for ourselves, like the Block Party, festivals and having food trucks and making sure all of our cars were branded... I remember when we were only 15 or 20 employees, every single employee had a business card." This proactive branding approach helped build a strong and visible identity from the start.



American Express & Square: A Recipe for Success

American Express and Square have proven themselves as steadfast allies of the food and beverage industry, and the Culinary Creators Project was a prime example of their commitment to fostering success within the hospitality sector.

American Express and Square's partnership provides the key ingredients for success for restaurateurs, a benefit that can't be overstated. Its broad acceptance, including on all Square tools, reinforces its status as a key player in the success of restaurants. Operators can rest assured that their customers can make quick, secure payments, both in-person and online.

At American Express, we have a long history of backing the food & beverage industry. Through our partnership with Square, we're helping merchants continue to grow and enhance customers' experiences by making payments simple and offering valuable marketing opportunities."

– Gerardo Welter, Vice President of Marketing, American Express Canada

To learn more about how American Express can support your business and Amex acceptance, please visit

amex.ca/merchant

AMERICAN EXPRESS | Square

Chef Matty Matheson Serves Up Truth with a Side of Mayo



Chef Matty Matheson is a Canadian culinary rock star and one of the most evocative and provocative names in food.

His signature no-holds-barred attitude, bottomless enthusiasm and creative approach to comfort food have culminated in a meteoric rise that's been incredible to behold, catapulting him from the kitchen to television, restaurants and pop ups, cookbooks, collaborations, apparel, social media superstardom, and now grocery aisles. Known for bold flavour combinations and a charismatic, unfiltered charm that has captivated audiences worldwide, Matty recently launched Matheson Food Company, a retail line based on family recipes that breathes new life and character into pantry staples like BBQ sauces, salad dressings, and macaroni and cheese.

We connected with Matty to talk food, fame, and the magic of mayo...

MM How has your journey from being a chef to a successful restaurateur and now a multifaceted foodservice entrepreneur shaped your perspective on the industry?

Chef Matty Matheson: *I think it has fortified my love of the industry, and my love of restaurants. Everything I do outside of restaurants helps to feed into the restaurants, and the restaurants feed into everything else that I do—it goes hand in hand. At the core of it, in my mind, I am always a 26-year-old chef and my first love is restaurants; it always has been. Cooking in restaurants has given me everything and now I'm just learning to do new things outside of that world. But it begins and ends with restaurants every single day.*

MM What inspired you to look beyond traditional restaurant settings?

MM: *I want to make restaurants that are true to myself. Everything starts with a feeling, a thought or a moment. Prime Seafood Palace is based on my love of growing up and going into my grandfather's restaurant on Prince Edward Island called Blue Goose. Matty's Patty's came from a pop up I did in Hawaii where we gave out free cheeseburgers. Cà Phê Rang is my love and respect towards the person who gave me so much at an early age, at Le Select Bistro, Rang. Rizzo's is a love story to my wife's family. Every single thing that I have done correlates to a real moment and a real story and that's what I'm going to continue doing, making things that have shaped me as a person. I feel that's the most original and most creative.*

MM Can you share the concept behind your other brands, Rosa Rugosa and Matheson Food Company, and how they reflect your evolution?

MM: *It's all about creating. I love clothes, I love cookware... it was a natural progression. It was something I have always wanted to do.*

I have said during interviews in the past that if I was to do something outside of cooking it would be in the fashion world. My love of clothes is real. It's another way to show who you are. Good products take time and concern, it's the same whether it's clothes, food, condiments, cookware. Quality doesn't lie, it's about holding a standard.

MM What elements of your new ventures are most important to you and how have they been received so far?

MM: *I think the thing I truly love, about all our businesses that we have, is how small we keep them and that we do a lot of it—if not all of it—ourselves.*

We are a small, independent company; we don't have a huge roster of employees, we are working together to figure it out and make things happen. We are constantly creating and problem solving, whether it be a new concept, a new design, a new flavour or recipe, and we approach it as a tight knit team. I think it's been received well. We take our time, and people are happy when they receive our product.

MM You've just launched the "Real Talk with Matty" campaign with Hellmann's mayonnaise. It may seem counterintuitive to some for a decorated chef to align with a heritage condiment brand. How did the partnership with Hellmann's come to life and why does it make sense for you and your brand?

MM: *I don't believe it's counterintuitive, I've always loved Hellmann's, I was brought up on Hellmann's. I've eaten it my whole life and we use it at our restaurants. I think this is an incredible partnership and it's great to work with them—their mayonnaise is the best.*

I've used Hellmann's products multiple times in various videos over the last 14 years of my career, I use it in my cookbooks and my restaurants. Making mayonnaise is cool sometimes, but Hellmann's is a go-to product.

MM In a world where food cost is increasingly challenging for operators, does developing recipes using foundational brands and products make more sense to you than it might have previously?

MM: *Absolutely. In the past, I wanted to make every single thing in house, from scratch, but my mindset has evolved a lot over the years.*

During the pandemic we had our pop up, Matty Matheson's Meat + Three, we opened Matty's Patty's, Cà Phê Rang, and even Rizzo's. During that time, we started sourcing products from other companies, which meant we didn't have to make every single thing in house for it to be a good menu item. We go through gallons of mayonnaise a week at Matty's Patty's as the base of our sauce. Instead of having it made from scratch, we use Hellmann's. I think everyone wins—we have a great, consistent product, the cost works, and we can put out good food at an approachable price and ultimately feed more people.

I pride myself on that and see that as a success.

MM What's the secret sauce for a great collaborative experience between two strong and well-defined brands?

MM: *Truly believing in each other is when it really hits. Something special happens when we come together to create something new and exciting and fun. It's the best.*

MM Can you share three pieces of hard-earned personal advice for your colleagues and hopefuls in the foodservice and hospitality sector?

MM: *Please don't quit, believe in yourself, and be dumb enough to jump.*

About Chef Matty Matheson

@mattymatheson

Internationally recognized chef and personality Matty Matheson has been breaking barriers since his cooking debut. His expansive career has brought many opportunities to the chef, restaurateur, two-time *New York Times* best-selling author (*Matty Matheson: A Cookbook and Home Style Cookery*), executive producer and television personality. Matty's presence in culture has grown exponentially in recent years as he's developed a number of companies outside the almost half a dozen restaurants he owns and operates; from his made in Canada workwear apparel brand Rosa Rugosa, to his home goods brand Matheson Cookware and food product brand Matheson Food Company, to his role as an executive producer and actor in the hit TV show *The Bear*, Matty has brought his unique personality to the world in a variety of ways. In addition to the forthcoming season of The Bear, Matty recently announced that his third cookbook, *Soups, Salads, Sandwiches*, will be released on October 22 through Ten Speed.

Complexity Into Clarity:

Exploring Culinary Innovation in Canadian Foodservice



By Tate Bastien, Foodservice Industry Specialist, Circana

Circana's March 2024 CREST® data shows visits declined for the first time in three years. In an era when consumers are increasingly mindful of their spending, restaurants must be equally mindful of their approach to entice customers through the door.

One strategy is tried-and-true menu innovation. It's a hot topic in foodservice: Based on Q4 2023 earnings calls of 56 public food/beverage companies, 88% of them indicated innovation was a strategy for 2024. The interest in innovation is well earned. **The Evolving Role of LTOs,** a recent Circana report on the impact of 30 LTOs at QSRs, revealed 91% of consumers reported they're likely to choose one chain over another if LTOs or new items are available.

Considerations for Successful Menu Innovation

1. **Value —** Satisfaction with value and affordability has plummeted in the last four years as food inflation skyrocketed. The largest QSR operators are introducing and expanding on value menus with more snack-sized offerings for tight-wallet consumers. This strategy is proving to get customers through the door – value menu orders grew 14% in the last year.
2. **Global Cuisines —** Many big operators are taking note of Canada's recent immigration patterns. They're looking globally for new flavours and dishes to create fusions that appeal to new residents' palates and adventurous diners seeking more exotic offerings. Think spicy. Servings of Asian food categories in CREST have grown 29% at QSRs compared to four years ago.
3. **Social Media Influence —** Circana's 2023 E-Commerce Report for Canada shows 21% of recent online retail purchases started on social media, and it's double that for Gen Z consumers.
    - **Fandoms and Nostalgia —** Fandoms have a strong dedication to their favourite teams, artists, and media, and they have an active online presence. Tapping into their enthusiasm can bring in a loyal fan base of diners and generate excitement for your brand's marketing on social media. Incorporating nostalgic offerings can entice older consumers to reminisce about an old favourite.
    - **Menu Hacks —** Mainstream operators have been integrating popular "hacks" in their menus: food combinations, non-traditional sauces, and beverage add-ons, all created online by an enthusiastic fanbase. Encourage engagement by interacting with your most creative fans and posting innovative combos on your socials.
    - **Virality —** Wacky naming conventions and bizarre flavour and texture combinations can give your brand a viral moment online. Occasionally your zany ideas might resonate with a food influencer, and you could hit the social media jackpot. But this point is the unicorn of innovation – it is difficult to manufacture since modern consumers are so marketing-savvy.

Innovation takes on many forms in the ever-evolving foodservice industry. With some creativity, combining these themes to push the boundaries of culinary innovation, you can attract new customers – and retain current customers' interest – while building a lasting, positive impact on brand perception.



About the Author

Tate Bastien, Foodservice Industry Specialist, Circana, advises some of the industry's top operators and manufacturers with exceptional industry knowledge and technical and communication skills. Tate can be reached at tate.bastien@circana.com.

Circana.



CULTIVATING PROSPERITY

FCC is Doubling Down on Empowering Food Entrepreneurs & the Canadian Food Economy



Clinton Buttar, FCC Ontario Vice President Commercial and Small Business



Bob Daniels, FCC National Vice President Commercial and Small Business

In the current economic climate, Canadian food entrepreneurs seeking financing for growth are grappling with several new and significant challenges. The sector has been hit hard, facing ongoing supply chain disruptions, inflation, and fluctuating consumer demand. These factors have added further strain to an unpredictable financial landscape, making traditional lending institutions more cautious and selective, a stance that has had a dampening effect on the innovation the sector so badly needs to accelerate out of the shadow of the pandemic and its aftermath.

Rising food costs and labour shortages have compounded these difficulties, squeezing profit margins and increasing operational costs. As a result, sector innovators are finding it harder to meet the stringent credit requirements set by banks and other financial institutions. The need for continuous innovation and adaptation to meet evolving consumer preferences must be met by investment in technology and infrastructure.

To navigate these challenges, entrepreneurs need financial partners that understand the seasonal ins and outs of the industry, and institutions like Farm Credit Canada (FCC) are providing creative lending solutions for the sector. As a Crown corporation that is 100 per cent invested in Canadian agriculture and food, FCC is a well-known ally of the agriculture industry and is increasingly verging into the F&B innovation lane. FCC provides flexible financing and capital solutions, while creating value through data, knowledge, relationships and expertise. FCC offers a complement of financial and non-financial products and services designed to support the complex and evolving needs of the food industry.

"We only focus on agriculture and food," Clinton Buttar, Ontario Vice President Commercial and Small Business at FCC clarifies. "We were created in 1959 because the federal government at the time saw that the big banks weren't lending money into agriculture due to the perceived risks. They knew agriculture and food had to be a sustainable industry, so they created FCC. We're a financial institution that lends money into agriculture and food and beverage agri-business, which makes us extremely unique and specialized. Our focus makes us experts, but it also allows us to offer resources that respond to the realities and cycles of the industry—we know the markets and we know what's going on in the sector, which gives us the ability to come in earlier to work with customers, lend money and also stay invested in agriculture and food through all types of business cycles. Some people would say it is limiting but we see it as a massive opportunity."

Evaluating risk through a different, nuanced lens and a food-forward mandate.

Buttar explains that, while FCC does not provide lending for restaurants per se, they are able to work with operators ready to scale into retail production. "If a restaurant has a sauce, a salad dressing or a gourmet bread they're known for and they want to get into production at bulk levels, we can finance every step of that process, from manufacturing to packaging to shipping."

Thanks, in part, to their long history working with farmers, FCC works as an industry knowledge and financial partner. FCC prioritizes relationships and sees the benefit of getting in early and staying with their clients as they grow and expand. They also have the freedom to look at clients through a different lens. "As a Crown corporation, we're a little bit different than traditional banks, Buttar explains. "Profitability is important, but our number one mandate, is ensuring sustainable food systems in Canada. Almost every business decision we make revolves around that idea."

According to Bob Daniels, National Vice President Commercial and Small Business, just like its customers, the organization has evolved over time. "In the farm world, it's all about sitting down at the kitchen table and getting to know the family and where they want to go, and we take that same approach with food producers. We get to know who they are and develop a strong understanding of their business. We know the sector better than any lender, so when they come up against challenges and tougher times, we understand what they're going through, and they know they can count on us. We trust them, and they trust us. That relationship is what allows us to take the business further and sometimes even take a bit more risk than some institutions would be willing to take."

At the beginning of 2023, FCC welcomed President and CEO Justine Hendricks, who wants to see opportunities for Canadian food to grow beyond our borders. "What I love about the way she thinks is the idea that FCC can help to grow the positive impact of Canadian food on not only the Canadian economy, but across the world," Daniels says. "We have incredible technologies and incredible food to offer the world. We're here to help Canadian producers and food businesses grow to reach that potential."

Enhanced advisory services.

FCC's end goal is to amplify the collective output of all Canadian ag, agribusiness and food and beverage customers, positioning itself as a unique partner, catalyst and champion in the industry. Rather than focusing on individual transactions, their role is to foster a collaborative ecosystem where the success of each customer contributes to the broader agricultural landscape of Canada. This holistic approach allows and, in some ways, requires them to offer more than just financial products; they provide comprehensive support that includes expert advice, innovative financial solutions, and research.

This wraparound service model is an invaluable resource and advantage for F&B innovators. By drawing on FCC's deep understanding of market trends, consumer behaviour, and the latest technological advancements, their customers can advance projects quickly, gain a strategic edge, and benefit from lessons learned by others. "We partnered with a customer recently who was looking into the possibility of expanding outside of Canada," Daniels recalls. "We were able to provide the kind of information, reports, and market research that will save them a lot of time and money. We were even able to connect him with farmers who are growing the particular product he wants to use and help negotiate some of their contracts. These are the kinds of connections we love to make."

Buttar points out that because FCC works with a very focused group of industries within the food and beverage sector, it's natural for their team to amass a wealth of interconnected knowledge, from cold storage to wineries to commercial bakeries to food processing. "You start to get a sense of what works and what doesn't," he says. "So, while you're not the decision-maker in terms of whether they'll ultimately proceed with a plan, you can have very informative conversations and help add a lot of value.

What's next in Canadian food innovation.

The national role they play in funding growth gives FCC a unique vantage point on the innovation priorities and opportunities for the food and beverage sector. As automation, AI and other technologies move into the forefront of many industries, FCC is working to help accelerate the growth and distribution of Canadian-made food and agriculture innovations and technologies from one province to another.

Daniels also points out that "desirability" is moving up the list of emerging trends in food. "People want Canadian product so bad," says Daniels. "Canadian products have a great reputation, and there's a role we can play to bring that to the sector. We want to be everywhere—not from a lending standpoint, but from making our country's food system known."

"We work hard to avoid picking the hot topic of the day," says Buttar. "We don't want to just put six or 12 months into an idea, a sector or a community, then check a box and move on. We establish a focus and stick with it to try and create lasting impact. For example, several years ago in line with the federal government, we realized we weren't doing enough to help grow and build resilience in Indigenous communities' food systems. We started down this road with intent a number of years ago and we're starting to have good traction. There's so much opportunity in the food and beverage space for young entrepreneurs from visible minority groups, women and rural communities. Leaning into those opportunities and clearing the path forward for new entrepreneurs is a real part of our focus and the future of food in Canada. And, if we don't deliver on these aspects of the business, then we're not delivering on our mandate to grow, diversify, and serve the sector."

"We can work with companies for different reasons," Buttar points out. "We can prioritize underrepresented communities, start-ups or businesses with strong sustainability practices. We can incentivize businesses that already have strong sustainability practices to do even better. We can incentivize others to develop new practices, become more socially and environmentally responsible or invest in automation so their staff can be reallocated to other, more desirable areas of their business. So, there's a human, an environmental and a social sustainability aspect to all of this, and it's a huge part of the direction of where we're headed. That's exciting for our customers and the industry."



NWC WILD RICE
SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN

In the vast and untamed wilderness of northern Saskatchewan, a unique and precious crop thrives under the care of those who understand it best. Wild rice, Canada's only native cereal, is a true grass which produces a grain that has nourished the First Nations and Métis (Indigenous) people for millennia. This wild grass brings together centuries-old tradition and a modern economics.

Saskatchewan is the largest harvester of wild rice in Canada. Each year, as the snow melts and the rivers begin to flow, skilled harvesters journey to the remote streams and bays of northern Saskatchewan to check on their wild rice fields, tending them over the summer months until August or early September when they reap their reward. This labour-intensive process demands not only physical stamina but also a deep knowledge that is often passed down through generations.

NWC Wild Rice, a subsidiary of North West Communities Wood Products Ltd., is a wholly Indigenous-owned buying company for the regional rice harvest that began in 2019. It works on behalf of its shareholder communities—Green Lake, Île à la Crosse, Beauval, Buffalo Narrows, Patuanak, Pinehouse, and La Loche—to stabilize and optimize the value of the commodity. "Historically, buyers used to just come into the region, buy up all the wild rice and then leave," explains Celine Favreau, North West Communities Wood Products Ltd. CEO. "There was never a local buyer. The region grows a substantial amount of wild rice, and it's a traditional, multi-generational business. It's a very valuable business and over the last five years, we've injected $2.5 million into the local economy, directly into the hands of local harvesters."

NWC Wild Rice operates amidst seasonal highs and lows like any agricultural business, and its annual performance relies on weather and particularly delicate environmental conditions, which make it difficult to predict the crop yield. Favreau recalls, "Since 2019, we've learned a lot. Before we got into the business, the wild rice of Northern Canada had been pulled into the commodities market, when the U.S. started growing wild rice as paddy rice. Our goal is to target a more sophisticated buyer. We've worked with the harvesters to certify the product. They sign organic plans at the beginning of the season if they intend to deliver to our stations. We're engaging them in the industry, and we now have over 1,000 customers across Canada, including chefs and Indigenous communities. We're now looking at rebranding to really hone in on customers who are right for us and who appreciate this product for what it is."

NWC Wild Rice has worked with FCC since the early days as their largest financing partner. They help the company manage seasonal cash flow, lending the funds needed to purchase the company's wild rice inventory, working through the embedded complexity of uncertain crop yields and market fluctuations. "They've really cared," says Favreau. "They phone regularly just to see how we're doing and if there's anything they can help with. Last year was our first bumper crop. When I look at our numbers in our first year, our yield was 71,000 pounds, and the next year was just 22,000 pounds. In 2023, it was 250,000 pounds. Even though we hadn't sold our total inventory from 2022, FCC doubled our 2023 loan, but we still had to leave rice in the fields because other potential loan partners didn't understand our business and back inventory, and felt the risk was too great. We had a buyer that year, but the deal was cancelled just as we headed into the summer of 2023."

FCC supports its customers by offering access to a variety of beneficial programs, which NWC Wild Rice takes advantage of. "We're working with advisors who are helping us gain greater knowledge of different distribution systems, like Amazon," Favreau shares. "We're also in the midst of a full pricing project and looking into the potential of international markets."

Favreau recalls attending the last year's FCC Food & Beverage Summit where the NWC Wild Rice team was able to connect with other agri-businesses to share experiences and growth ideas, noting that FCC brought the event to Saskatoon to make it easy for Saskatchewan companies to attend. Initially, NWC Wild Rice had been focused on opening a processing plant, but their perspective has evolved as a consequence of learning through the connections and conversations they've had, many of which have been with or facilitated by FCC. "We've learned more about moving through the food industry, and now we're looking at tracing our product back to the lake where it was grown, possibly doing some hand batches the traditional way, and we've also started to look at some value-added processing like popped wild rice."

FCC brought NWC Wild Rice to RC Show in Toronto this year, and the size of the company's rice kernels was a surprise to many. They were able to meet with Costco at the show and are now having conversations about retail possibilities for this year's holiday season. "We have the inventory to take advantage of opportunities now," says Favreau. "FCC's patience, respect and understanding have been amazing, and getting to go to RC Show was the opportunity of a lifetime."

VEGFRESH INC.
TORONTO, ONTARIO

Vegfresh is celebrating 34 years of business this year. Like most food processors, the company's journey to becoming one of Canada's largest fruit and vegetable processors was not a straightforward path. Serving the foodservice, food manufacturing, baking, and retail sectors, Vegfresh offers a diverse portfolio of over 100 products, including potatoes, carrots, onions, apples, bananas, lemons, and oranges. Their state-of-the-art, 55,000 square foot facility enables them to provide custom-tailored processing solutions with just-in-time manufacturing—a delicate balance.

As Vegfresh expanded its reach and product offerings over the years, the company recognized the critical need for a financial partner that understands the unique seasonal cadence of the food industry and could provide tailored financial solutions to ensure seamless operations throughout the year.

"I've found that it's extremely important in this business to deal with partners who share a common goal and vision and who understand your business," says Vegfresh President Mike Sangiorgio. "Pardon the pun, but the food business really is feast or famine, and many people don't understand it. If you're only looking at the debits and credits, you can't grasp the vision of a company or understand what it's capable of doing."

Sangiorgio shares that, due to factors like raw material costs and the cyclical nature of the business, Vegfresh has occasionally struggled to demonstrate the consistency and stability conventional financial institutions need. During the harvest, the company generally does well, but managing cash flow during the off-season or unforeseen product shortages can introduce risks that make lenders uncomfortable or put businesses offside their agreements.

Material costs depend on the growing season, crop yield, and transportation, yet Vegfresh needs to offer price stability to maintain long-term customers. "Throughout the years, when the pricing of raw material went through the roof, we couldn't adjust our price even though factors were outside our control. I switched from conventional banking to FCC 19 years ago because they focus on the agricultural industry and really understand the business. They recognized our worth and that we wouldn't always grow in a straight line. We have years when we're doing really well and then we'll struggle for a few months, like the year the apple crop in Collingwood, Ontario was decimated, and we only got 10 percent of the expected yield. We had to source product from Washington."

A major factor in Vegfresh's ability to navigate these challenges has been its dedicated management team. Their strategic leadership and deep industry knowledge have been instrumental in steering the company through the complexities of the agricultural sector. From managing the volatility of raw material costs to ensuring continuous cash flow, the management team has played a crucial role in maintaining Vegfresh's stability and growth.

Another challenge in the agri-food business lies in managing and valuing production, storage, and processing. In the fall, apples, potatoes, onions, and carrots are harvested and stored, with Vegfresh having to pay for the apples when they go into storage. Conventional institutions typically view this practice as overstock, with the additional risk of the stock spoiling before it's sold. "We actually take those apples as an asset," Sangiorgio explains. "But what is a bank going to do with $1.5 million in apples? FCC is able to see those apples as a true asset, like any other raw material."

As a federal Crown corporation, FCC reports directly to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, highlighting its unique accountability and deep roots in Canadian food. Over the years, they have expanded their interest and investment to cover the entire food chain.

"FCC is interested in every aspect of my business," says Mike. "They're interested in my machinery, my people, my facility. FCC visits my facility to see our plant and new equipment, makes recommendations and connects us with other customers and farmers. They're committed to building the business and show us that they care, going above and beyond what any regular financial institution can do for us. We also have a great bank for mainstream financing—and FCC was instrumental in bringing us to that bank and its agricultural division."





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MENU in conversation with with Val Upfold, Executive Hospitality Recruiter, HR Advisor & Principal at Val Upfold Inc.

Val Upfold is a seasoned hospitality leader and industry advocate. Her long career has evolved and ascended from the bustling floors of independent restaurants to a human resource leadership role with Oliver & Bonacini to her own hospitality executive recruitment firm. Val's story is not just about climbing the ranks; it's about redefining them with intention and vision, blazing a path forward in an industry that thrives on innovation and expertise.

Val joins the MENU editorial roster this fall, with the launch of her regular column, ***People Perspectives***. By sharing her extensive knowledge in human resources and offering invaluable advice and insights to industry professionals and independent restaurant operators, Val is looking forward to giving back to the community that has been instrumental in her own success, while fostering growth and elevating standards for others across the hospitality sector.

This conversation with Val took place a few days after her return from a volunteer consultancy role in Ghana.



MM Your career is a true example of the evolutionary potential of hospitality careers. Can you share your journey?

Val Upfold: *I started out bussing, then bartending and ultimately serving at a country and western bar in Guelph, Ontario. I worked there while studying business at Western University, and it was then I started to realize that I really liked restaurants and wondered if I could make a career out of it. I then moved to Australia on a working holiday visa and found a serving job at a restaurant in Sydney. When someone asked if I wanted to be a manager, I said I'd try it. I stayed for three years before coming back to Toronto, which was when I got hired at Canoe. When I started working there, I felt I was way over my head because I was 27 or 28 and the servers were twice my age. I felt I had to level up my skills, so I started studying wine, which led to getting my sommelier designation.*

After four years or so, I started to think, "Okay... I love this industry, but I don't know if I want to work until 2:00 a.m. every shift and work every weekend. That's when I looked into other things I could do and so I did HR training and pitched Peter Oliver and Michael Bonacini, the owners of Oliver and Bonacini, on the concept that the organization needed human resources. The organization was smaller then, just three restaurants. I put together proposals and started doing all this extra work on the side—developing training manuals—while I was still managing at Canoe, and after about a year, they finally agreed. I started doing a few days a week in HR while still managing and moved to full-time HR in about six months.

MM So, you hustled your way up and made your own role?

VU: *Yes, and that's something I tell a lot of people—that you have to kind of "make your own job" sometimes in hospitality. Especially women. We're not always very good or very comfortable selling ourselves because you have to be persistent, and maybe that's not in our DNA as much. I worked at O&B as HR Director for about 10 years—so five years at Canoe and 10 years in HR—until someone I used to work with asked if I wanted to get into recruiting.*

I wasn't sure I wanted to retire at O&B, so I thought I'd try it. I started recruiting with another company and opened my own about three years ago. It's hospitality recruiting, so I'm still working in the restaurant industry, but I'm doing my own thing.

MM You're a mother—was it difficult finding flexibility and balance within the industry?

VU: *Being a mother and trying to find your way up in the hospitality industry is tough, to put it mildly. When I was working in HR, I was working Monday to Friday days, so I was already in a good position, but I didn't want to go back to full time after my maternity leave. Again, I pitched Peter and Michael on coming back three days a week. I put together a plan to showing a few ways that could work and they agreed. The idea was accepted because I did the work and put together a few*

scenarios they could consider. I didn't just ask for a favour or an exception. So again, you have to speak up and be strategic if you want to make a move out of day-to-day operations.

MM Because some of the flexible structures that have become routine in other sectors are tougher to visualize and implement in hospitality?

***VU:** Yes. You really need to make a plan for yourself. If you want to stay in the industry and you want to have children, you need to plan and put your steps in place.*

At O&B in HR, I was often the champion of new ways of accommodating life changes. I would go to Peter and Michael and ask why we couldn't do things differently? Why couldn't we have a lunch manager? Part of my role was changing mindsets and developing different ways of doing things and demonstrating how they would work.

MM Did that cause any friction for you?

***VU:** It created some conflict with some other leaders in the company who were more "old-school" in their thinking—like you have to be on the floor 12 hours a day. It created some conflict for sure, but most of these adaptations were on behalf of longer-term employees.*

That's also important. If you've only been working somewhere for six months, it may be hard to get leadership aligned on a new idea. Again, you need a plan.

I can specifically remember the first person who asked and was granted a flexible schedule at O&B, and she ended up working for them for 20 years. That willingness to work differently also helps with retention because you're not losing amazing people just because they get to a point in their careers when they need a regular or part-time schedule. Allowing job sharing and other accommodations is particularly important if you want to retain great women and attract others.

MM How would you describe and promote the scope of long-term professional development and advancement opportunities in hospitality now?

***VU:** It's changing, and there's more awareness these days, but you still need to plan what you want to do, and you have to set yourself apart. If you're a restaurant manager and you want to move into an office job, which a lot of people eventually want to do, you have to differentiate yourself and get the skills for the role you want. If you're good at training in restaurants, you can take an instructional design course. If you want to get into marketing, you can take a marketing or graphic design course. You have to do something that makes you different from everybody else because there is a lot of competition for "restaurant adjacent" roles.*

It's also smart to gain experience in both independent and corporate restaurants to make yourself more well-rounded. You should always be taking a step up with every job move.

> "… you have to kind of "make your own job" sometimes in hospitality. Especially women. We're not always very good or very comfortable selling ourselves because you have to be persistent, and maybe that's not in our DNA as much."

MM We have heard that you were central in the development of the legendary O&B Handbook. Is this true?

***VU:** I was involved, but there have been many iterations of the Handbook through my time there. There was a large HR section, so I would have done that. Remember, it was a small company when I started there. I was with Peter every day, for years, because his office was right across from mine and he was very involved. There were a bunch of us involved in that, because we were in at the beginning of what O&B would become—they have over 50 restaurants now.*

MM That Handbook comes up in a lot of conversations we've had across the industry—it's a bit of a legend.

***VU:** When you're in it you don't necessarily realize it, but so many extraordinary people have come up through that company, and many are still there today. Peter was very involved in it and that really impacted a lot of people. At the time, no one in independent restaurants had that sort of thing.*



MM What impact do you feel the early integration of HR and the Handbook might have had on O&B, and on the independent restaurant industry more broadly?

VU: *I think it made people feel like they were a part of a real business. There was still the love of hospitality and the curtain opening and The Show, but people felt they were also running a business and learning transferable skills. The Handbook laid it all out. The company values that it contained were spoken about all the time—at every briefing. We'd always say, "Oh, they drank the O&B Kool-Aid," but that was a thing because people grew and successfully developed within that system. Peter always said the Handbook was something we needed to live and breathe every day, and there's no question it helped with O&B's growth.*

MM What do you feel are the toughest human resource challenges facing the industry today?

VU: *From a recruitment perspective, it's the hours. There are a lot of really talented people who love the industry, but it's not physically or mentally possible for them to stay in it. So, in an industry where you're already having a shortage of labour, it's exacerbated. If people are wanting to start families in their 30s, you're losing a lot of talent at a relatively early age.*

The labour shortage is the biggest challenge, so the industry can't keep refusing to look at things differently and can't keep doing things the same way.

> "The challenge is to change people's perceptions, starting from parents. Why are we all okay with young people getting into the mutual fund or insurance industries, but not a restaurant company?"



MM What is the greatest human resource opportunity for the industry?

VU: *I think it's a similar and related thing. My neighbourhood is full of Bay Street bankers and lawyers and similar professionals, yet I also live here. I'm a restaurant person who has managed to create a successful career. We need to address the perception of restaurants as an interim job industry.*

The challenge is to change people's perceptions, starting from parents. Why are we all okay with young people getting into the mutual fund or insurance industries, but not a restaurant company? To support that change, restaurants need to mirror the professionalism of other industries to attract professionals they need.

It also has to take root in schools. I was on a panel with someone from Fairmont and another hotel group and they now have a co-op program for their restaurants. Spending more time in high schools and colleges and educating parents about all of the industry career options is so important. It's a different generation—parents are involved in everything.

On the other side, the industry has to back it up by actually putting development programs in place. The last thing we want is for young people to buy in, get in and then have a negative experience. Restaurants and the industry need to put their money where their mouth is so that the perception can change. We can't just tell people they can work in a restaurant and then end up as an SVP of Finance for Four Seasons or Swiss Chalet and not build those career paths.

MM What's the single greatest contributing factor to a restaurant's success?

VU: *I'm going to have to say people—that really does impact everything. We used to ask an interview question, "Rank in order of importance: money, employees or guests." Employees rank first because employees directly impact the money and the guests. If you prioritize and invest in employees, that positively affects everything else.*

MM The last thing I want to talk about is your recent trip to Ghana. Catalyste+ is an organization that recruits senior professionals across a variety of in-demand sectors to provide mentorship and advisory services to their clients through a sequence of short-term, strategic assignments around the world. How did that come about and what were you in Ghana to do?

VU: *I always said my dream job would be working in HR for Doctors Without Borders in a war zone. This is a much safer way to do it. My first assignment with Catalyste+ was during the pandemic, so it was virtual. I applied to help support Village of Hope, which started as an orphanage, but grew to build a primary school, then a high school and now a hospital*

in Gomoa Fetteh in Ghana. The facilities grew as the village saw the success of the original orphanage, and now has about 400 employees. One man started it all and he doesn't have any human resource support, or a fundraising plan—he's just doing everything on his own, in a "grassroots" way. Their board of directors wanted to hire an HR Director, and approached Catalyste+ to help them get started with a performance management system and provide training on how to conduct formal performance reviews, give feedback and tie that to compensation. In Ghana, compensation is tied to the inflation rate, which was 52 per cent last year.

What was it like to set up formal processes in a completely different country?

VU: *It's very different in a lot of ways. Jobs are scarce in Ghana, so if an employee has a problem with something at work, they often won't say anything. Part of why I was brought in to help the new Director was the fact that, because I was flown in as an "expert from Canada", leadership were more likely to listen to me, simply because I was coming from the outside world.*

We started with the basics, working from the ground up and I trained all of the managers and executives on their performance management systems, but I think the biggest difference this made was that it got employees talking about things at work, and that was progress for them.

You have to keep things in perspective. We are so fortunate here to talk openly about schedule flexibility, maternity leave, recycling... I just posted something on my Instagram about how there's a bill about to be passed in Ghana that could jail employers for hiring an LGBTQ2S+ person.

I'm also obviously a social extrovert—I worked in restaurants, so it was hard for me to be by myself for two weeks in a place that's dark most of the time because there's no power off and on. People would come and drop off food to me around 6 p.m., and I'd invite them to stay and chat, but they couldn't because they had to be back at work at 5 a.m. the next morning. They were working later because I was there, and they had to stay to cook my dinner.

But then the word must have gotten out, because everyone started talking about what was happening and how they felt at work or what they were working on for the first time. I was able to go and speak to the Managing Director and HR Director about some of the conversations I'd had with staff, and they were able to set up follow up meetings for the next week.

It's a good place, and they're really not at fault for just getting this started. If you look at their Employment Standards Act and their labour laws, they're fairly similar to Canada's. But, who's going to follow them when there's no following up and they can't even get reliable power?



> If you look at their Employment Standards Act and their labour laws, they're fairly similar to Canada's. But, who's going to follow them when there's no following up and they can't even get reliable power?"

You've agreed to write a regular industry HR column, *People Perspectives*, in MENU. What drew you to the opportunity and what are you hoping to share?

VU: *Hospitality is an industry that I love—there are so many great things about it.*

When I started my hospitality recruiting company during the pandemic, people needed me. As operators continued to lose money but still called on my services, I was conflicted. There were people who had never had to use recruiters before dropping off cheques at my house and asking me to please help them. I knew they couldn't afford it and it gave me a terrible feeling. Our industry was falling apart, and I was doing better than I ever had.

I feel the need to give back somehow, and I think I can provide useful, helpful information to support independent operators. So many people in this business have the passion, but they don't know the HR essentials, and they can't afford to pay someone to support them. That's what I hope People Perspectives can help do.

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Empowering Hospitality & Revolutionizing Wellness

Smart Serve Ontario partners with Not 9 to 5 and GreenShield to launch a groundbreaking mental health initiative that will provide free mental health services to over half a million industry professionals.



Richard Anderson
Executive Director,
Smart Serve Ontario



Hassel Aviles
Executive Director,
Not 9 To 5

photo by Clay Williams

The hospitality sector, serving nearly 22 million Canadians daily, has been under immense post-pandemic strain. With many establishments continuing to grapple with financial losses and debt, the mental well-being of hospitality workers remains at peak risk.

Smart Serve Ontario, the charitable organization that has provided province-wide beverage alcohol training and certification for everyone involved in the sale, service, and handling of alcohol has made a monumental stride forward. "Smart Serve Cares" is a collaboration with Not 9 to 5 and GreenShield, which aims to provide essential and complimentary mental health services to over 550,000 active Smart Serve certificate holders in Ontario. This monumental stride towards supporting the hospitality industry will help bring desperately needed support and services within reach for thousands of people.

While Smart Serve Ontario has long supported the hospitality industry, following the pandemic, there was no denying that some of the deep-rooted challenges common in the industry had breached the surface. "We had heard about some of the challenges in the industry around depression and burnout," Richard Anderson, Executive Director at Smart Serve Ontario recalls. "It wasn't new, but we had a conversation at our Board level to figure out how Smart Serve could give back."

Third-party focus groups were quickly commissioned, and the Smart Serve Ontario team awaited the results. "We assumed people in the industry would be interested in a points program or greater acknowledgement and recognition in their places of work, but no. We were told that the best thing we could do to help people in the industry was to provide mental health support. It was pretty resounding. We decided then and there to do our homework and find partners we could work with. The number one name mentioned in our focus groups was Not 9 to 5."

Not 9 to 5 is a non-profit global leader in mental health advocacy and training for the hospitality and culinary industries. Since 2019, the organization has been offering specialized mental health support, spurred by an initial survey of hundreds of hospitality professionals wherein 90 per cent of respondents responded "yes" when asked if they experience mental health/substance use challenges. Since that early revelation (or validation), the non-profit has further evolved to offer workshops, webinars and now an online educational platform, CNECTed.

"There's always been a need, and it's not going away," Hassel Aviles, Not 9 to 5 Co-founder and Executive Director confirms. "Unfortunately, it's increasing. This campaign is so perfectly timed."

In fact, Not 9 to 5's research reveals a grim reality: 87 per cent of front-line food and beverage staff report burnout, and 77 per cent and 84 per cent grapple with depression and anxiety, respectively. Disordered eating was reported by 63 per cent of respondents. Despite these troubling statistics, only 38 per cent said they sought professional help, with an astonishing 62 per cent citing financial barriers as the primary reason they did (or could) not. "These numbers show how important it is that this campaign provides free access to this kind of support," Hassel emphasizes. "This means that, a year from now, our survey numbers will probably look a lot different."

The unique, social nature of the hospitality industry is the stuff of lore; however, the environmental elements that define the workplace structure can converge into a perfect storm, directly contributing to heightened mental health challenges for its workers. "For those at the top of hierarchy, it can be easy to forget what it's like for others," says Hassel. "The data does an amazing job of identifying this problem. Managers and leaders are often not adequately equipped with the full skills and training for the job—they may not be able to identify when a person is struggling emotionally or with their mental health. If you don't have specific workplace mental health education and training, you may miss those signs. Beyond that, we have unconventional hours, and we often have financial insecurity around tips and projecting our income from one month to the next. Financial health contributes directly to mental health. Workplaces that neglect mental health often become toxic workplaces. When you have unconventional hours, toxic workplaces, and inadequate breaks, the byproduct is going to be higher rates of mental health challenges."

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT
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WHO IS ELIGIBLE?
All valid Smart Serve Certificate holders in Ontario.

HOW DOES IT WORK?
Users choose their registered therapist and may schedule 15-minute interviews with a variety of registered therapists prior to selecting.

Confidential, online sessions are easy to schedule and take place over an encrypted virtual video or telephone platform.

What is INCLUDED?
Three hours of FREE virtual mental health counselling through GreenShield's Member Assistance Program (MAP), including dependents (if applicable), plus couples therapy (if applicable).

One year of access to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Digital CBT) provided by GreenShield Health, to help people with mild to moderate anxiety and depression achieve their wellness goals. Available in either self-led or coach-led formats.

Free access to Not 9 to 5 CNECTed workplace mental health certification coming this fall.

Access to the GreenShield Pharmacy, which offers personalized clinical services to help manage prescriptions, health, and pharmacy needs from the comfort of home, connect easily with a pharmacist and sign up for free medication delivery anywhere in Canada.

Unlimited access to online resources, articles and educational materials from health experts via GreenShield.



Both an advocate and mental health survivor herself, Hassel is proud of the quality of the Smart Serve Cares program, and particularly enthusiastic about the synergy between the three partners. “I have personal, lived experience and have used this virtual therapy platform, so, when Richard and I were considering who to work with on that aspect, GreenShield was such an exciting partnership to explore.”

GreenShield, Canada’s first payer-provider health and benefits organization, integrates insurance, benefits administration, and health services such as mental health, pharmacy, and telemedicine to simplify access to care and improve health outcomes. As a non-profit social enterprise, GreenShield reinvests its earnings to support equity-seeking communities through its GreenShield Cares initiative, aiming to generate $75 million in social impact investments and improve the lives of one million Canadians by 2025, with a focus on mental health, oral health, and essential medicines.

Through GreenShield’s online platform, Smart Serve Cares users can book virtual therapy sessions, participate in self-guided virtual cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), and access a comprehensive library of mental health resources. Therapy sessions are flexible, with the option to choose to book either three one-hour or six half-hour sessions. “I have not only used the platform myself, but I’ve also referred members of the Not 9 to 5 community to it—and I’ve only heard positive feedback,” Hassel shares. “The user experience is so different from other platforms and offers culturally sensitive, trauma-informed therapy. I think it empowers the user. The user gets to choose their registered therapist. That’s so important. Having a platform that puts you in the driver’s seat, where you can choose a therapist based on your needs and your identity is so important. The platform also allows users to spend 15 minutes with prospective therapists to determine whether they’re a fit. If they need to, they can meet with eight potential therapists for 15 minutes each, and it doesn’t count against their three hours of free therapy. It’s a much more equitable experience for the user.”

Smart Serve Cares works as an à la carte program of distinct resources users can access in a “choose your own adventure” fashion. Forcing or funneling users through a sequence of resources is an approach Hassel, as a



> **“We need to connect with and understand the industry, and with a campaign like Smart Serve Cares, we can have an open conversation about mental health”**



person who has lived through mental health challenges, does not find effective. “I don’t want to be forced into anything. I want to choose for myself, what I need, when I need it, and how I need it. With Smart Serve Cares, you can go in and just look at the articles and leave or take a break and come back in a week or two. You can learn and access support as you need it, or not at all. I love virtual therapy—you can literally be at home in your pyjamas. I have experienced those days when getting out of my room or my bed is just not an option, so being able to log on and choose whether to turn the camera on or not is helpful. I really love that this campaign offers more than one resource and more than one way to engage with it.”

Richard underscores that Smart Serve Ontario doesn’t want to simply hand out their course, and that there’s more to the relationship between the organization and the industry. “We need to connect with and understand the industry, and with a campaign like Smart Serve Cares, we can have an open conversation about mental health, which can help ensure the sector’s success. As we all know, there’s a massive skills shortage, which also contributes to the list of reasons people may not choose hospitality as a career.”

Smart Serve Cares offers enhanced skill building for hospitality leadership around mental health, to support workplace conversations, team and individual accommodation through a library of resources. Managers can input their Smart Serve Certification number and access GreenShield’s bank of articles on key aspects of mental health like burnout, depression, and substance abuse. In fall 2024, Smart Serve Cares users and managers will also be able to access Not 9 to 5’s online educational platform, CNECTed, a mental health certification program specifically designed for hospitality and restaurant professionals. This program focuses on equipping participants with the knowledge and skills to manage and improve mental health in the workplace, promoting a culture of mental wellness and support within the industry, including mental health literacy, self-care strategies, and how to create a psychologically safe work environment.

“So many times, when owners or managers hear about these programs, they think it’s for staff but not for themselves,” Hassel points out. “This is such an opportunity for the people with the most power, privilege and influence in the workplace to use this service because the best way they can set the tone in the workplace is through role modeling. If they really want their team to use this or any other service, they need to model the desired behaviour.”

The launch of “Smart Serve Cares” is not just a campaign but a half-million-dollar investment and call to action. By providing accessible mental health services, this powerful partnership is paving the way for a healthier, more supportive environment in the hospitality industry not only in Ontario, but across Canada. “There’s no question we wanted to respond quickly to mental health challenges,” Richard says. “It’s a major investment from Smart Serve and we’re really hoping we can all see a change in those numbers. Seeing Smart Serve Cares make a difference would be a really nice payback. If this program does nothing but encourage conversation and an openness about mental health, and how mental health is health, we’ll take it.”

Learn more about Smart Serve Cares: **smartserve.ca/cares/**

Learn more about Smart Serve Ontario: **smartserve.ca**

Learn more about Not 9 to 5: **not9to5.org**

Learn more about GreenShield: **greenshield.ca**



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THE INVISIBLE INGREDIENT:

Food Safety Training as a Tool for Restaurant Profitability & Efficiency





Domenic Pedulla
President of Canadian Food Safety Group

From fine dining to quick service restaurants, food safety is the unheralded backbone that keeps the industry thriving. The recent surge in awareness about food-borne illnesses has spotlighted the dire consequences of neglecting this crucial aspect of foodservice. While menu design, customer experience and gastronomic delights take centre stage, the silent guardian of our dining experiences—food safety—remains in the background, often unnoticed, until disaster strikes.

Domenic Pedulla, President of Canadian Food Safety Group, got into the business in Calgary in 1999. While working at Costco, he and a friend realized that not only were they very good at cleaning, but they also really enjoyed it. As they worked to get the cleaning company off the ground, they learned that foodservice businesses didn't want outside cleaning services, they really wanted training for their staff. They pivoted and set to creating their original suite of high-quality food safety training materials designed to provide clear information to industry staff. "When we

became a food safety training company, we quickly figured out that many companies did not have food handler training or only one person on the staff had the training," Pedulla recalls. "That's just not enough. By 2005, we had put our focus on offering a nationally recognized food safety program to train as many people in the industry as possible for the lowest cost, because for restaurants, the barrier is always price."

"At Restaurants Canada, we firmly believe that food safety training is not just a regulatory requirement, but a fundamental investment in people," says Kelly Higginson, Restaurants Canada's President and CEO. "Providing comprehensive food safety training for all staff not only ensures the well-being of customers but also fosters a culture of responsibility, accountability and professionalism. This investment can enhance employee confidence and retention, ultimately contributing to a more positive dining experience and a stronger, more reputable industry. Moreover, consistent investments in training reinforce a restaurant's commitment to quality and safety, which plays a role in earning enduring trust and preference from consumers."

Today, Canadian Food Safety Group and their sister company, SafeCheck® Brand Protection, have become Canada's first names in food safety training and audits, working with many of Canada's top foodservice brands. Canadian Food Safety Group offers a broad range of training including Food Handler, HACCP certification, WHMIS, Food Allergen Awareness, Respectful Workplace and many others. The nationally recognized Safecheck Food Safety Certification course is only $25 per person, with even lower rates for groups. "If you have a group account, you can manage your staff directly within our learning management system," says Pedulla. "Our goal is to make training as affordable as possible, so everybody can get trained. If it prevents one food-borne illness, it's worth it."

They also work with colleges and high schools, where students can get certified training on four areas of food safety for less than $20. "For a lot of young people, foodservice is their first job," says Pedulla. "This training makes them not only instantly employable, but skilled and safe, and the restaurant doesn't have to do anything."

The Gravity of Food Safety

Food safety encompasses a broad spectrum of practices designed to prevent food-borne illnesses, which can range from mild discomfort to life-threatening conditions. The stakes are incredibly high: contaminated food can not only harm consumers but also irreparably damage the reputation of foodservice establishments. Despite stringent regulations and rigorous inspections, lapses in food safety still occur, sometimes with devastating consequences.

Fueling Brains Academy E. coli Outbreak

In Calgary, a severe E. coli outbreak traced to a central kitchen serving multiple daycares resulted in 350 cases, with some resulting in hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a condition that affects the kidneys and causes blood clots. The outbreak, first identified in September 2023, has led to a $10 million class action lawsuit filed by impacted families against the daycares and the catering company, which also faces 12 municipal charges, including operating without a proper food services license. The trial is scheduled for September 2024.

The Chipotle Outbreaks

Chipotle Mexican Grill, once the darling of fast-casual dining, suffered a series of food safety lapses that drastically altered its public image. Between 2015 and 2016, the chain was linked to multiple outbreaks of E. coli, norovirus, and Salmonella across the United States. The fallout was severe: hundreds of customers fell ill, leading to a substantial drop in sales, a temporary closure of numerous outlets, and a significant hit to the company's stock price. The repercussions extended beyond financial loss, shaking consumer trust and prompting Chipotle to overhaul its food safety protocols.

Epic Burger & Waffles Cronut Bruger Contamination

In Toronto, a food poisoning outbreak at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in August 2013 was linked to contaminated Cronut Burgers, a croissant-doughnut pastry filled with a beef patty and topped with maple-bacon jam. Toronto Public Health officials confirmed that the burger was contaminated with Staphylococcus aureus toxin, which can cause severe nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. The food vendor responsible, Epic Burger and Waffles, was temporarily closed as investigations and further testing were conducted. The severity of the outbreak highlighted the importance of stringent food safety practices at public events.

The benefits of all-staff training for foodservice operations...

Proper training is the linchpin of an effective food safety strategy. Every member of the foodservice staff, from entry-level employees to senior management, should be thoroughly educated on food safety protocols. This includes understanding how to prevent cross-contamination, the importance of maintaining correct temperatures during food storage and preparation, and the proper use of personal protective equipment.

Continuous education and regular refresher courses ensure that staff remain





vigilant and up to date with the latest safety standards and regulations. Well-trained employees not only minimize the risk of food-borne illnesses but also contribute to a culture of safety that permeates the entire establishment.

"If somebody gets sick, that damages your reputation," Pedulla points out. "That should be motivation enough. But one day of being closed down could cost a restaurant thousands of dollars, and a full shut down and a lawsuit could cost millions. I think many operators focus their concerns on risks related to alcohol service because they've seen those lawsuits, or slip-and-fall or other accident cases. We do independent audits through SafeCheck, and we hear, 'I have never made anybody sick,' all the time. My response is, 'That you know of.' Most people who believe they've experienced food-borne illness won't report, but they blame the last thing they ate and tell others. Deferring training not only puts your business at risk, but it also risks the livelihood of your staff and damages the reputation of the entire industry."

SafeCheck performs audits that assess the proper application of food safety measures well beyond the standard checklist or even the restaurant's own brand standards. The goal is not only compliance, but excellence. Pedulla explains that food safety training is like insurance. "You want to be able to say you did everything within reason to protect your guest. Training just one person out of a staff of 10 or 20 may mean you're legally compliant, but it's not going to go down well in court."

Training is also an investment in people, which can increase employee satisfaction and retention, which also improve efficiency. "When you invest in people, they feel they're part of a team, with everyone moving in the same direction, on the same journey," says Pedulla. "It builds a community within the establishment, so people stay because they feel they're part of a larger thing."

"Universal staff training also plays an important role in marketing," Pedulla notes. He believes that the enhanced care and attention to detail proper training and certification provides to staff matters to customers and adds to the operation's value proposition to the community it serves. "When customers know you're a good employer who invests in your staff, whether it's training or benefits or a continuing education program, they are more open to paying a few dollars more for your offering. People want to go where they feel safe, and where people are valued. If a restaurant is in the news for a food safety or public health issue, you've broken trust with your community, and it's very unlikely many of them will return."

Pedulla points out that food handling certification has a direct and positive link to food waste reduction as well, because careful food inventory management practices lead to more efficient cycling of food and ingredients. "If a business follows the 'first thing out' rule and has standard operating procedures in place for that, manages portion control, and optimizes protocols to guard against cross-contamination, they'll reduce the spoilage that produces waste."

The Path Forward

As the foodservice industry evolves, so too must its approach to food safety. Innovations in technology, such as blockchain for traceability and advanced pathogen detection methods, offer promising avenues to enhance food safety. However, the foundation remains the same: a commitment to rigorous standards, continuous education, and an unwavering dedication to protecting consumers.

Pedulla identifies stale training as a major hazard for foodservice business, recalling an exchange he had with a Red Seal Chef. "Even professionals who received their training in school and have been working for decades need to stay on top of the new science. I was in a kitchen with a seasoned chef, and he had five-gallon pails of sauce in his cooler. I asked him how long he thought they'd take to cool, and he said they'd be cool by the next day. I sent him a study from Pete Snyder, a well-known Professor of Food Science and Nutrition at the University of Minnesota who founded the Hospitality Institute of Technology & Management, a food safety training, education and consulting firm. His study showed that it actually took a metal pot in a walk-in cooler three and a half days to get down to four degrees Celsius, because the cool sauce on the outside acts as an insulator."

As the restaurant industry continues to dazzle with its creativity and flavours, it is the unglamorous but vital domain of food safety that ensures consumers' enjoyment is safe and uninterrupted. The industry must remain vigilant, learning from past mistakes and continually striving to uphold the highest standards of food safety.

"We all need and want to be safer, and if any industry is equipped to do this outside of health care, it's the food industry," Pedulla says. "We're working with these regulations all the time, under immense scrutiny, with the lowest margins, and the smallest percentage of safety-trained staff. Everything is against this industry, but an overwhelming percentage of the time, the food is safe. That says a lot, but we can do better. I would love to see the foodservice industry embrace food safety as a selling point. Not only do we do all this amazing stuff, but we also do it right. I would love to see owners commit to getting everyone trained."

After all, in the quest for hospitality excellence, there is no room for compromise when it comes to guest safety and experience.

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IMAGINATION & INNOVATION:

Industry leaders, visionaries and tastemakers share their hopes and dreams for the future of foodservice.

Restaurants Canada asked over 100 RC Show speakers, thought leaders, and innovators to share their raw views on where the Canadian foodservice industry is headed, or where it should be. These perspectives from the frontline visionaries and experts who are actively shaping the industry matter because they are not only informed by their extensive experience but also by their intimate understanding of emerging trends and consumer expectations.

By listening to these voices, we gain a deeper understanding of the critical areas that will drive future success, from sustainability and technological innovation to enhancing consumer experiences and fostering inclusive workplace cultures. Their contributions provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of the modern foodservice landscape, ensuring that businesses are not only prepared for the future but are also positioned to thrive.

Analyzing and distilling their responses involved organizing the data into key themes, assessing their importance, and visually presenting the insights in a clear, engaging format to facilitate informed decision-making and strategic planning. Here are some of the highlights and key takeaways...



The Burning Question:

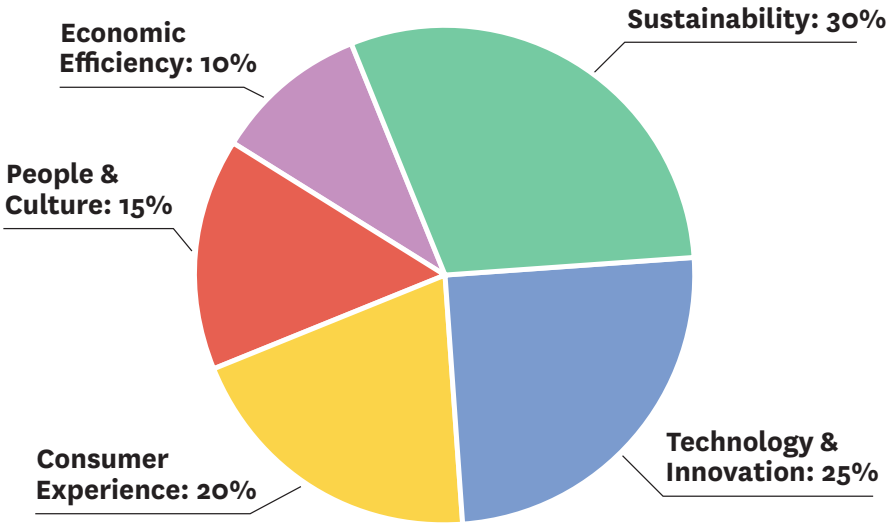
Looking ahead, what trends or developments do you foresee shaping the industry in the next few years?

The Consensus:

A holistic approach integrating sustainability, technology, consumer-centric strategies, and workforce development is essential for the industry's future success.



Key Themes for the Future



1. Sustainability (30%)

Invest in Sustainability.

Emphasize eco-friendly practices, focus on reducing food waste, prioritize local and sustainable sourcing.

"There will be a greater emphasis on sustainability, with consumers and businesses alike prioritizing eco-friendly practices and ethical sourcing. Women, known for their holistic approach, will play a significant role in driving these changes."

"Sustainability in the sourcing of our product will not only be a trend but a necessity."

"Sustainability will increasingly become an expectation among Canadian consumers, who will also be looking for evidence you are being sustainable. A claim is not enough anymore."

"Sustainability is no longer a trend. It's a real and necessary part of the industry that needs focus. Tailored experiences will continue to grow to give everyone the night out that they need and deserve. And I hope a continuation of accessibility aims, to make everyone — no matter how they identify in the world — able to experience the hospitality industry on their terms."

"Making an impact in the community is a key trend that will shape the industry in the coming years - we all have a part to play in supporting sustainable practices and making an impact in the fight against food insecurity."

"There is a broad misconception that sustainability is an expense for your business. We will see an increasingly broad understanding that in fact the opposite is true. Doing good is good for business. Just like Too Good To Go, where the more bags we save, the more value we create for partners, and the more Co_2e we reduce. It's a win-win-win."

"Important topics like humanity, food waste, supporting equality, sustainability, biodiversity."

> *I foresee menu engineering really shaping the industry in years to come – it will dictate how restaurants manage inflation and rising costs and they can maintain their value proposition. I also expect to see the emergence of more small, intentional concepts – restaurants with micro-menus, small footprints and hyper-local offerings."*

"Increasing consumer awareness and concern about environmental issues will drive the demand for sustainable practices in the gastronomy industry. This includes sourcing locally, reducing food waste, using eco-friendly packaging, and adopting sustainable farming methods."





2. Technology & Innovation (25%)

Embrace Technology.

Integrate AI and automation, utilize advanced data analytics, enhance operational efficiency and customer experience.

"The industry will continue to integrate technology, enhancing customer experiences and streamlining operations. Having worked myself in the Food Tech Corporate world- I can assure you that tech in our industry is not going to stop at just robots & food delivery systems. It's a lot more complex than that."

"Everybody loves talking about AI, and we are playing in that space as well; but the fundamentals of a successful business will always be the end experience of the customer when they interact with your business, website, app or product. Technology should be in support of enhancing the customer experience and not just deployed because it is cool. The future will be tech enabled but the most successful companies will deploy technologies that are customer centric."

> *Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies will play a significant role in automating various aspects of restaurant operations, such as inventory management, scheduling, and customer service. Chatbots, voice assistants, and AI-driven analytics tools will enable restaurants to operate more efficiently and cost-effectively."*

"AI and other tech helping revolutionize how we interact with brands and experiences."

"New and exciting ways to make it easier for operators to interpret information will be a game changer for the industry over the next few years. There is so much data available, and not enough time to review it. This can lead to missed opportunities to optimize the business."

"More technology! Automation and real-world use cases for AI, more personalization for the guest based rich data, the continued evolution of restaurant business models to meet consumers when, where and how they want to get food."

"The rapid technological growth we're seeing globally—AI, robotics, real-time analytics, and automation—are all going to have an impact on hospitality. The question is what form that will take and how the impact will be received by guests, but I'm confident forward-looking operators and vendors will use these tools to create even more amazing guest experiences."



3. Customer Experience (20%)

Enhance Customer Experience.

Offer personalized dining experiences, create unique and memorable dining settings, focus on customer-centric approaches.

"I feel like the mid-level hospitality experience is being reshaped right now and in the next few years to come."

"I feel like customers and consumers are going to want (and receive) more customizable experiences."

> *I hope it's a commitment to guest experience. Technology can provide our industry with plenty of efficiencies and improve productivity, but reinvesting those resources into the guest service experience is going to set the good apart from the great."*

"Co-creation and collaborations with chefs on the creation of menu items is very trendy as of late within the QSR segment."

"Reliable neighborhood restaurants that are lively in ambiance (since so many people now watch movies from home, shop from home, play video games from home, order take-out to eat at home). When people choose to dine out, they don't want proper fine dining as much as they want to feel a sense of people gathering and being in the midst of lively conversations and people energy. Restaurants of the future need to exude hope, not exclusivity."

"Destination neighbourhood bars in small communities."

"I foresee the rise of more franchises with brands that are powerhouses offering the best in food, aesthetics and trends."

"In lifestyle and societal trends, there is a dominant theme here across all ages and sectors, but most particularly in residential and commercial spaces: North Americans are desiring connection and authenticity, with a strong focus on health, wellness and sustainability."

"People are going to be looking at small businesses more so now to provide them with quality products they need. They will want an experience when purchasing."

"Consumers continue to look for more and more experiences."

"I see sit down restaurant service becoming less in demand than experiential dining."

Key Themes & Trends Driving Future Flavours & Experiences



Sustainability & Health Consciousness

- Consumer focus on sustainability practices
- Increased demand for plant-based, gluten-free, and clean-eating options

Culinary Diversity and Global Flavours

- Appreciation for authentic regional cuisines
- Trend towards fusion cuisine that blends traditional techniques
- Experiences that highlight rich narratives and celebrating diversity

Innovation & Creative Expression

- Creative culinary expressions like fermentation and storytelling
- Experimentation with bold flavour combinations and innovative ingredients

Consumer Preferences & Trends

- Growing trend towards better-for-you foods and value-added products
- Interest and awareness of underrepresented cuisines
- Moderation in consumption and non-alcoholic beverages

Collaborations & Cross-Promotions

- Interest in creative chef collaborations and cross-promotional activities to expand reach

4. People & Culture (15%)

Promote a Positive Culture.

Foster diversity and inclusion, promote a positive workplace culture, focus on mental and physical well-being of staff.

"I believe there is a strong cultural shift happening, where the newer generation is guiding the older ones on ways to move forward in the industry with increased respect and clearer boundaries. It is shifting the culture and showing us that it has direct results on staff retention and healthier work-life balance. This shift will also affect how establishments will need to plan out continued education and training, as well as team development."

"DEI is slowly fading and not the "hot topic" or in the new cycle as much. But inequalities still exist. As an industry, we need to work together to do better, be more diverse, inclusive and equitable to ensure everyone feels like they belong in their workplace. We need to push for the development of sustainable DEI strategies and keep learning and unlearning. Customer behaviours are always changing and if we continue to practice empathy and listen to learn more deeply, then we can break down barriers, and build more purpose-driven strategies, plans and deliverables that support and include those that have been traditionally ignored or not included."

"As health and wellness becomes a forefront movement, I hope the industry makes moves to prioritize people over profits."

"I see a trend of changing the culture in the restaurant industry. Making the kitchen more inclusive and respectful space for all. It's something I believe in and something I will always push for."

"Those with a personal brand will Level Up."

> *I foresee ownership having a huge shift in the next few years in this industry. Ownership for the BIPOC community is growing, thanks to incubators, mentorships, and funding."*

"Beyond the kitchen, I am here to change the notion that for years, media has showcased that chefs are the new rockstars. The party lifestyle, drugs, and rock & roll like personas. I challenge these old stereotypes and we should celebrate chefs as the athletes they truly are and support the movement of incorporating healthy habits into our lifestyle that will positively affect both our personal and professional lives. The kitchen demands physical stamina, mental acuity, and relentless dedication. The kitchen is not just a stage; it's a battlefield where chefs need to work



with precision, navigate intense heat, and orchestrate symphonies if you will. It's time we acknowledge the athleticism required to create culinary masterpieces and use this vision as a tool to inspire and educate the next generation of leaders to come."

"Side hustles are going to continue increasing as individuals will be more inclined towards a gig economy. Employment contracts will need to be more flexible to allow this. As labour shortages are still prevalent, we will be seeing this trend continue to some degree for the food service, accommodation, and tourism industry. As the new law is being put in place for salary transparency, we will see salaries being added to the job descriptions (no crystal ball needed here)!"

"Proper certifications and paid training programs for your staff."

"A heavier push for more diverse leadership representation, with women taking on key roles in shaping the industry's direction. Women do have unique perspectives and collaborative nature will which drive positive change and inclusivity."

"I am very excited to see the industry continue to embrace and value the voices and experiences of traditionally underrepresented groups in ways that create tangible outcomes."

"Linking values with work - linking our work to the personal values that drive us allows us to work every day with passion and conviction in what we do and to create an environment that supports the values that are important to us."

"Better stability—work, family, pleasure. Looking ahead, better work-family-life balance is what is going to help the industry move forward and create stability."

5. Economic Efficiency (10%)

Implement Cost-Effective Solutions.

Manage rising costs through streamlined menus, explore innovative pricing models, implement cost-effective solutions.

"Tech and returning to hospitality value not just saying what people want to hear."

"Streamlining menus will be even more critical in keeping costs down and focusing on your most popular and profitable items. This optimization ensures you're always improving operational efficiencies and enhancing the overall customer experience."

"I don't know what the future holds, but I know that I would like to see more restaurants and/or food service establishments with pay-what-you-can systems/specials. Going out to eat and having nice dining experiences outside of the home are becoming less and less accessible as the cost of just about everything rises."

"Consumer sentiment is obviously the biggest driver of all, and creating value through differentiation is required at all levels of the industry."

> *"As labour costs continue to rise and technology continues to develop, we're going to need to figure out how we continue to prioritize the "service" part of the word foodservice. How do we treat employees, customers, vendors, and partners? Recognizing our shared humanity is essential to our success."*

"With climate change looming as an existential threat, there will be an increasing need to strengthen business resiliency against this and an expectation from consumers to reduce carbon emissions. Sourcing locally will become increasingly vital, even for something like seafood which is often imported from far flung corners of the world. Industry professionals should pay attention to local harvesters and fish farmers and make use of the plentiful and delicious seafood that we have in our backyard."

"I'd look into changes in consumer demand, from new flavours to cleaner products and ready-to-eat. Also crucial to pay attention to supply chain issues and leverage new technologies."

"Further emphasis on sustainability, health and wellness, customization, and value and loyalty."

As we see an increase in the prices of food and sundries, I see us returning to the basics, executed well, and presented in a new fashion. Cost effective dishes and experiences will continue to rise in popularity as we face such things as inflation, and the cost of goods continue to rise."

"Cash flow is going to become increasingly important. Operational costs continue to rise, and profitability is at a low in the industry. Staying cash positive will allow hospitality owners to stay nimble and ahead of unexpected expenses. Consumers attention spans are also getting shorter, which means that there will be continued emphasis on unique concepts that delight customers. Restauranteurs will need to stand out to draw customers in."

"Doing less for more. Maximizing impact and specialty. Focussing on the experience as a whole."

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THE TAKEOVER

Women leaders claim the stage and the conversation at RC Show

BY CHRIS SZEGO

Every year, the President/CEO panel is one of the most hotly anticipated and eagerly attended sessions at RC Show, and RC Show 2024 was no exception.

This year's panel stood out as a historic milestone: for the first time ever, the stage was exclusively commanded by women, marking a groundbreaking moment in the event's history and the reflection of leadership in the foodservice and hospitality industry.

Acting as the session moderator, Kelly Higginson, CEO & President, Restaurants Canada, was the first to point out that it shouldn't be remarkable. The foodservice industry has always been staffed by a broadly diverse demographic. In addition to long being the source of first jobs, women make up 58 per cent of entry-level positions in foodservice.

Unfortunately, that number dwindles as the positions increase in importance. Kelly noted the problem is less 'glass ceiling' than 'broken rung': despite making up the majority of entrants to the field, women don't proportionally advance. Women comprise of only 30 per cent of management in the foodservice sector, and at the C-suite level, that drops to a mere 11 per cent.

Encouragingly, female ownership of foodservice businesses is on the rise. And the all-female slate of power brokers on the stage gave weight to the idea that times are, in fact, changing. Sometimes quite rapidly: Chantalle Butler, President, Molson Coors Canada, was confirmed in her role mere days before RC Show, taking the reins as the first female CEO of a major North American brewery on April 2, 2024.

Taking the Big Chair

Formerly the Vice President of Sales Finance for Canada, Chantalle, who holds a Masters of Accountancy and a Bachelor of Mathematics from the University of Waterloo and CPA and NACD Directorship certifications, oversaw the company's national fiscal activity for five years. She also currently serves as Chair of The Beer Store (TBS), the largest beer retailer in Canada. In her new role with Molson Coors Canada, Chantalle intends to build a collaborative and innovative workplace culture.

Chicago restaurateur and Let's Talk Womxn founder **Rohini Dey**'s foray into foodservice was unexpected. Having earned a Masters in Economics and a Doctorate in Management Science, Rohini served as a management consultant with McKinsey & Co. and an economist with the World Bank. "Frankly, to leave the World Bank was ridiculous," she said. "It's not what good Indian girls do." Making the jump to restaurant ownership came with both financial and social risks, yet in 2004, her Chicago restaurant Vermilion opened to great acclaim, making headlines and hitting 'Best Of' lists. "So maybe that risk paid off," she acknowledges.

Juanita Dickson met Janet Zuccarini, owner of Gusto 54 Restaurant Group, while on holiday. With a Masters in Marketing and Communication from Schulich School

of Business and a Degree in Hospitality and Business Administration from Toronto Metropolitan University, Juanita had decades of brand growth experience. In 2014, Juanita was brought on board as Vice President of Brand Expansion to help Gusto 54 go global. In less than six months, she was promoted to President. Today, Gusto 54 Restaurant Group has 10 restaurants in Canada, and two more in Los Angeles.

As **Susan Senecal** was finishing her Bachelor of Science (Biology) from McGill University, she already knew she preferred the connection and pace of the foodservice industry. She joined A&W in 1992, working as Area Manager, Chief Marketing Officer and Vice President of Operations on her way up. As CMO she led the company's shift to using only beef raised free from added hormones or steroids. When she became A&W's fifth CEO in 2018, she was the first woman in the role.

The Importance of Mentorship

While each woman's journey has been unique, they all agreed on one thing: the profound consequences of good mentorship. "Mentorship is so important," said Chantalle, who considers Darryl Rowe, of Weston Bakeries, one of hers. "He was the first to treat me as a businessperson, not just a finance person. He pushed me to add value, rather than numbers."

Susan concurs. She learned a lot from Bob Johnson, who introduced her to a new kind of strategy creation. "As CEO, your job is to help people get the strategy out of people's heads," she said. "Choosing, not creating, is important." The process helped Susan usher in A&W's major Strategy Renewal in 2023.

Juanita is grateful to have been supported by incredible male leaders, "but Janet (Zuccarini) was the most pivotal for me." Zuccarini's guidance was invaluable to Juanita; so was her enthusiasm. "She'd say 'Let's get things done. Let's work together to make magic!' That kind of bravery is empowering."

Rohini approaches mentorship from the other direction, actively creating opportunities for women to connect and thrive. In 2012, she launched the James Beard Foundation Vermilion Women in Culinary Leadership Scholarship, to open doors and shine a spotlight on women in the culinary field. At the same time, she founded the ongoing JBF Vermilion "Chefs for Women" program at Vermilion. In 2020, in the thick of the COVID-19 crisis, Rohini launched Let's Talk Womxn, an action movement that unites and supports women restaurant operators in cities across North America.

LET'S TALK WOMXN
ENTREPRENEURS. FOOD & DRINK.

Rohini sees Let's Talk Womxn as a macro-level action movement. "We don't have a vision, or a mission statement. 90 per cent of those are non-quantifiable anyway. Our goal at Let's Talk Womxn is to invite, share, change and adapt."

Let's Talk Womxn (LTW) aims to boost the visibility and build the economic power of women in foodservice. What started with 15 Chicago restaurateurs has grown to more than 850 female foodservice entrepreneurs in Canada and the U.S.

City co-hosts organize monthly 'Deep Dive' sessions, and participate in forums, events and keynotes. The group charges no dues, choosing collaboration over competition, cross promoting each other's ventures and events.
LTW was busy in April and May 2024. They hosted a reception at RC Show in Toronto, and two events at the National Restaurant Association Show – curated dining adventures and the LTW/National Restaurant Association Women Owners & Leaders Reception – then a gourmet evening at Vermilion, full of food stations and unfiltered opinions from LTW restaurateurs.

Toronto is the first Canadian city to join the LTW network. For more information about their upcoming events, visit

letstalkwomxn.com

Managing Change

Evolution is constant in foodservice.
The panelists had sound advice for operators struggling with change. Chantalle says that consistency is the number one indicator of success. "We need to ask, 'Who do we want to be?' We can tweak the answer, but consistency makes alignment possible. When everyone knows what their role is, you can also set what you're not going to be."

Last year, Rohini gave Vermilion's menu a complete overhaul. Presenting different facets of Indian fare is what first inspired her to enter the restaurant business in the first place. "I was appalled by how Italian/French-centric 'fine-dining cuisine' was. My arrogant goal was to spread the same veneration to Indian and Latin foods." And it worked: Vermilion piled up accolades. But eventually, it was time to evolve. "Renewal is fun, and there's so much to share. For our 21st year, our menu collects the best of three facets of Indian food: Indian-Latin, Indian-Chinese and Chaat (Indian street food)."

"Strategies have to live," says Susan, who knows about change. During her tenure the company made moves that have become industry standards for chains, among them adding plant-based burgers to the menu and discontinuing plastic straws. Last year, A&W announced their Strategy Renewal. "We're moving on from nostalgia. It was a little scary.







We had lots of learning, and lots of collaboration." Susan started the process with responsibilities and accountability. "Climate goals accompany our strategies. There are behaviours we need to improve."

"We don't always take the path we start on," says Juanita. "We're operating differently than we did two years ago, or than last year." With so much in flux, she urges leaders to be consistent and clear. "Spend the time up front to think about who you are, where you want to be and how to get there. Your team members execute your strategies, so have a team that shares your beliefs." She also recommends providing your team with technological tools and dashboards: "Remember, what gets measured gets done."

Sign of the Times

The roles of CEO and President extend far beyond day-to-day management, especially when it comes to foodservice. But Kelly reminded the audience that there has to be room for more than just work. It's important to celebrate the wins. And there were several wins over the course of RC Show 24.

Chef Meeru Dhalwala won the Restaurants Canada Culinary Award of Excellence. When introducing Chef Meeru's keynote, Daniela Profenna, Head of Partner Marketing at Skip, announced the Skip Food Industry Award, a new category in Canada's Most Powerful Women: Top 100 awards designed to acknowledge women in leadership roles and illuminate the many opportunities for young women entering the industry. And Susan won the Restaurants Canada Leadership Award of Excellence.

Looking ahead, the panelists shared the transformations they expected in the next few years, in their companies and the industry at large. Juanita sees a return to basics, with an eye to authenticity and relevance. "We need to be diligent about menu creation, about building team relationships and customer experiences. There's big opportunity in Toronto; it's so diverse."

For her part, Susan believes that evolution is the new normal. "Restaurants often start small and grow. In the pandemic, we were essential." That connection runs both ways and carries a real responsibility. "What's part of the world is part of foodservice." She also recommends budding foodservice entrepreneurs attend local and wider sector events to connect to the community at large.

Big iconic brands like Molson are healthy and relevant. Given that, Chantalle sees innovation as the next necessary step. "The benefit of being a global company is that you can be focused and purposeful. When you have a stable base, it's time to premiumize." Meaningful innovation and experiences are what matters.

Rohini is excited to see the spread of world flavours. Even more, she looks forward to more equalization in the industry. "Foodservice is the second largest employer in the U.S., but archaic in terms of policy. 70 per cent of restaurant employees are women but there's no paid family leave!" Change on social fronts will be key to making the industry better for everyone, including embracing immigrants as the backbone of the economy.

These executives found their voices, joined executive conversations, and realized they had the drive, intelligence and power to change the foodservice landscape for good. Which is why, when trying to navigate the many unique challenges of the foodservice sector, it pays to get guidance and support from the experts at the very top.

ENHANCING TRUST ON YOUR MENU WITH THE BLUE COW LOGO

Restauranteurs and customers both know high-quality ingredients make for a great meal. When diners see Dairy Farmers of Canada's (DFC's) Blue Cow logo on a menu, they get that assurance immediately.

The iconic logo identifies products that are made with 100% Canadian milk and milk ingredients, and research shows that 66% of customers prefer products with the logo (December 2023, Circana). Canadians trust it as shorthand for high standards, sustainable practices, and animal care.

The Blue Cow logo stands for safety

Our nation's dairy farmers work hard to meet some of the world's highest production and safety standards. Farmers go above and beyond already strict federal and provincial regulations covering everything from milking to cooling and storage, all to ensure only the highest quality milk leaves their farms.

To further strengthen this commitment, Canadian dairy farmers came together to develop a national quality assurance program called proAction®, consisting of 82 standards and practices in six key areas: milk quality, animal care, livestock traceability, biosecurity, the environment, and food safety.

A total of 42 of these requirements are related to producing milk safely, & that means when customers see the Blue Cow logo on your menu, they will feel assured about the dairy in their meal.

The Blue Cow logo stands for sustainability

Dairy farmers have been caring for the environment for generations and are naturally committed to sustainable farming. They have collectively committed to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 by reducing dairy's carbon footprint, land use, and water consumption as much as possible while capturing and storing carbon where possible (also known as sequestration).

It's more than emissions, though: from healthy soil to plants and pollinators, farmers work hard to keep everything in balance. DFC's Best Management Practices Guide to Mitigate Emissions on Dairy Farms helps farmers identify and implement practices for improving overall environmental sustainability in ways that work for their unique farms. Producing dairy while actively restoring and regenerating local ecosystems is another reason why Canadians trust the Blue Cow logo.

The Blue Cow logo stands for animal care

Healthy cows produce the best milk. Their comfort, care, and welfare are priorities for Canada's dairy farmers, who rely on a whole network of farming professionals to give their cows the utmost attention. Farmers follow strict biosecurity protocols and work with feed specialists and veterinarians to oversee and assess cow health. A national system lets the Canadian dairy industry address issues and keep milk quality consistent from coast to coast. Farmers work every day to maintain cow and facility cleanliness, and biosecurity standards manage risks to avoid cows getting sick in the first place and prevent the spread of disease within the farm.

High standards, sustainability, and animal care all make the Blue Cow logo a recognizable and trustworthy brand. By attaching the DFC seal of approval to qualifying menu items, restaurants provide an easy way for customers to identify items made with 100% Canadian milk and milk ingredients – foods that align with their values!

CELEBRATING EMERGING LEADERS:

Volunteers LEVEL UP RC Show 2024







RC Show Restaurants Canada

RC Show 2024 was a spectacular celebration of innovation, culinary artistry, and the vibrant culture that defines Canada's foodservice industry. This year's event brought together seasoned professionals, visionary entrepreneurs, and curious enthusiasts, all united by their passion for foodservice and hospitality. While the spotlight often shines on the celebrity chefs and groundbreaking exhibitors, it is crucial to acknowledge the unsung heroes whose dedication and hard work made the show a resounding success: hospitality students and industry volunteers.

From the bustling kitchens to the meticulously arranged exhibition halls, RC Show thrived on the energy, enthusiasm, and professionalism of these emerging leaders. Their contribution went far beyond the tasks they performed; they became ambassadors for the foodservice industry, embodying the future of Canadian hospitality with grace and determination.

THE BACKBONE OF THE EVENT

Hospitality volunteers brought their A-game, playing pivotal roles in ensuring the smooth execution of the event experience. "From assisting in the VIP/Media room, to providing support for our programming, volunteers are involved in various tasks that cater to the diverse needs of the show," highlights Saige Friedman, Restaurants Canada's Volunteer Program Coordinator. "This hands-on experience not only contributes to the success of the event but also offers volunteers the opportunity to learn, network, and gain insight into different facets of these dynamic industries."

RC Show volunteers demonstrated remarkable adaptability, stepping up to meet the diverse needs of the Show with a positive attitude and a willingness to learn. Their expertise and commitment were evident in every aspect of the show—whether it was managing the flow of visitors, providing insightful tours, or helping facilitate engaging workshops.

EMERGING LEADERS AND AMBASSADORS

The hospitality students and industry volunteers of RC Show 2024 are more than just contributors; they are the emerging leaders of tomorrow. Their participation in the event showcased their potential to shape the future of Canada's foodservice industry. By working alongside established professionals and gaining hands-on experience, they are developing the skills and insights necessary to lead in an ever-evolving landscape.

As ambassadors for careers in foodservice, these individuals are changing perceptions and inspiring others to consider a path in hospitality. Their dedication and hard work highlighted the rewarding and dynamic nature of the industry. Through their interactions with attendees, they showcased the diverse opportunities available, from culinary arts and restaurant management to event planning and tourism. Their enthusiasm was contagious, sparking curiosity and interest among attendees, and reinforcing the notion that a career in foodservice is not only viable but also incredibly fulfilling.

"Volunteering at the RC show is an invaluable experience for anyone interested in the foodservice, hospitality, and events industries," says Saige. "Volunteers play a crucial role as an extension of the RC Show team, supporting its fast-paced environment and ensuring its smooth operation."

To the hospitality students and industry volunteers who made RC Show 2024 a resounding success, Restaurants Canada extends its deepest gratitude.

Volunteers are the heartbeat of RC Show. Every year, they prove that the future of Canada's foodservice industry is in capable hands and remind us of the importance of nurturing and supporting the next generation of hospitality professionals and providing them with the opportunities and resources they need to succeed.



RC SHOW 2024: TOP 10 VOLUNTEERS

1. Paulo Chan
2. Jasmine Wingell
3. Emily Ramos
4. Niva Marium Baby
5. Oshadi Vithana
6. Sheba Kaur Gurm
7. Chirag Sharma
8. Derrisha Francis
9. Andrea Gomez Navarro
10. Kevin Macwan

MEET THE STARS BEHIND THE SCENES:

Top 10 Volunteers Who Made RC Show Shine

RC Show

To learn more about volunteer opportunities at RC Show, please contact: volunteer@restaurantscanada.org





WHAT I KNOW FOR SURE:

A Reflection on RC Show's first Black Experience Pavilion



BY ELLE ASIEDU, CO-FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE RE-SEASONING COALITION (TRSC)



Back in 2022, my co-founder Philman George and I were working in the corporate world while building The Re-Seasoning Coalition (TRSC) in the background. We met two years prior, after separately approaching Restaurants Canada to discuss a greater need for diversity in their ecosystem and ended up forming our non-profit soon afterwards.

That April, after I moderated a panel on DEI in foodservice and Philman rocked the culinary stage as host of the Garland Canada Culinary Competition at RC Show, we debriefed our experiences across all three days of the event and found that the Show, at that point a solid 77 years in the running, needed more representation from the Black diaspora from top to bottom. We wondered what it would take for us to be the ones to make it happen.

In 2023, we ushered in the winds of change on the Speaker Stage, leveraging our ground-breaking national study to outline the importance of the Black experience to the vitality of the foodservice industry. We also hosted a panel on entrepreneurship that inspired new business owners and highlighted powerhouses in the community. Though our footprint was relatively small, the organization was visible and our appetites for action were thoroughly whetted.

So for us, April 2024 was GO time. We hit our stride and partnered with another non-profit, Foodpreneur Lab, to create the first-ever Black Experience Pavilion.

Four years into being TRSC's co-founder and one year into being its Executive Director, what I know for sure is that social impact is more than just a buzzword; it's a lucrative and transformative way of thinking and doing what's actualized through steadfast collaboration with others.

Our 20x40-foot Pavilion came to life with the support of Kraft Heinz Canada, the City of Toronto, and High Liner Foods and offered attendees a 360-degree space to connect with 33 CPG brands and watch 15 interactive demos that introduced new or trending products and techniques. Showcasing everything from zesty harissa made with local ingredients to vanilla bean powder direct from Madagascar, our Pavilion packed a punch and provided a much-needed shift in a rapidly changing consumer environment.

The space also served as a launch pad for the first Black Talent Networking Session, a micro recruiting event (the first-ever at the Show) that connected savvy brands with Black job seekers interested in building their future within corporate foodservice. We were thrilled to see talent engage with 20 brand representatives across seven national, provincial and local brands including Sysco Canada, High Liner Foods, and Skip and we know the event will become a fixture of future Pavilions as it fills a plunging gap in the industry.

Our collaboration with Foodpreneur Lab has been a symphony of ideas, alignment and willpower that propelled us to the winner's circle via the Best First-Time Exhibitor Booth



Janice Bartley, Executive Director, Foodpreneur Lab

"We were able to highlight out-of-the-box opportunities for partnership and connect our CPG entrepreneurs to revenue streams beyond traditional grocery store shelves. The success of the Black Experience Pavilion means that the industry is learning that innovation and diversity go hand in hand."



Helen Mekonen, Partner, BIPOC Executive Search

"At BIPOC Executive Search, we recognize the importance of staying ahead of industry trends and understanding the broader implications of changing demographics on our work. For us, networking is not just about business opportunities—it's about fostering a community that values inclusivity and creativity. By participating in TRSC's Networking Session, we gained valuable insights and connected with individuals, organizations, and companies doing phenomenal work."



Philman George Corporate Chef, Kraft Heinz

"People come to RC Show see what's new and experience the next innovative product or service. It's imperative that the Black community shows up in these spaces and showcases what we have to offer especially as the industry seeks to diversify the supply chain. We have created pathways that connect our community with our industry and connect our industry with community; it's a two-way street that's prime for expansion!"

Award. Although it's easy to get caught up with the minutiae of running a non-profit and planning for the years ahead, I often take a page out of Philman's book and remind myself of what we were able to accomplish with no prior exhibitor experience. Bravo to all involved – we beat the odds and set a standard for inclusion and innovation I look forward to continuing at Shows to come.

What I also know for sure and what you probably do, too, is that there is much to be gained from playing the long game. From taking the time to appraise possible partners to combing through wordmark designs and re-jigging blueprints, the old adage that things worth doing are worth doing well is 120 per cent true.

I am also a firm believer in data that points to the power of diverse tastes, talents and trends as a catalyst for industry agility and resilience. At industry events, the importance of racialized groups to the overall economy is a topic that's often glossed over with relative ease. However, these kinds of omissions are strong examples of how not to build a competitive advantage in the wake of Canada's shifting demographics. Consider the fact that the Black community is projected to make up the country's second-largest racialized group by 2041, cementing their role as an influential cohort of tastemakers and trendsetters. How prepared is your organization for that shift?



(Left to right) Philman George, Marie Fitrion, Janice Bartley, Calla Lee, and Elle Asiedu





(Left to right) Sharon Bailey, Elle Asiedu, Marie Fitrion, Philman George, Janice Bartley, Calla Lee, Chef Zeke

THE RE-SEASONING COALITION

If you're curious about how to beat the curve and harness innovation, reach new audiences, and attract top talent, get in touch to learn about how to partner with The Re-Seasoning Coalition at the 2025 RC Show.

Whether you look at the Show's first Black Experience Pavilion as evidence of what's wrong with this country or an example of what we need to move forward as a modern, multicultural society, the truth remains that change cannot happen in a vacuum and that the people who dare to dream differently are usually the ones who do.

I'm looking forward to creating more buzz and adding to the list of what I know for sure. Are you?

Follow The Re-Seasoning Coalition on LinkedIn or opt in to their e-newsletter to access community news, data and resources:

thereseasoning.org

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Our storied legacy means we understand seafood better than anyone. With offerings like Blue Cod — a healthy, low-fat white fish from New Zealand — we can help enhance your menu while also cutting down on labour and costs. Its delicate texture and mild flavour offer a bounty of culinary potential, so you can give customers the choices that delight your customers and fit your budget.

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BLUE COD

TASTE
Mild flavour and flaky texture, similar to cod/haddock.

VALUE
High-quality species at a reasonable price point.

VARIETY
Allows for a wide variety of cuisines and dishes.



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THE GROUPEX ADVANTAGE:

How membership can unlock huge savings with Canadian Linen & Uniform Service



Brian Reinhardt has always been involved in the foodservice industry—directly or indirectly. His early days were spent working in restaurants and the connections he made there led him to a years-long role representing Canadian Linen & Uniform Service, Canada's oldest linen services company. For the past five years, Brian has added new dimension to his industry experience as Key Account Consultant with Groupex Canada, working with their members to find cost savings on many of the essential products and services restaurants can't operate without.

We connected with Brian to learn more about Groupex Canada's program with the national linen company.

MM Can you tell us a little bit about your career and why you joined Groupex Canada?

Brian Reinhardt: *I have been in and out of the restaurant industry since I was 18 years old. I would leave and then get dragged back in—so I love it. I can't get away from it. When I left restaurants, I worked at Canadian Linen for 15 years, delivering to restaurants and making connections. Later, I went into sales for Canadian Linen, and I brought in Groupex Canada. I loved that they are a non-profit and how transparent they were with their partners and members compared with others Canadian Linen was working with at that time. Now, Canadian Linen has been with Groupex for decades and they only have one linen provider, and that's Canadian Linen, with over 1,100 national members using their services.*

MM What types of operations does Canadian Linen serve under Groupex?

BR: *Pretty much every foodservice operation—there's really nothing that isn't a fit. We've got everything from little coffee shops that'll have just two mats and some aprons and towels all the way to big fine dining restaurants that will go through thousands of napkins, tablecloths, chef coats and washroom services, and everything in between. There's an option for any independent.*

Because we only have one linen supplier across the country, we are able to negotiate an industry-leading pricing structure. We've only had one pricing increase in the last seven years. We also offer a rebate, and if you reach out to Groupex, we'll do a cost analysis that will show the savings in comparison to their current linen provider.

MM You're confident you can beat the price of other established providers for restaurants?

BR: *I do a lot of the cost analysis across the country for Groupex, and I can count on one hand the amount of times where our program wasn't better. People aren't going to switch for two, three or four percent savings. We walk in the door of some of these places and save 15 to 50 per cent.*

In today's landscape, the cost of everything is increasing. If you're a high linen user, you may be spending $10,000 to $15,000 more a year. Some are seeing increases of up to $40,000 a year. So, if you can cut their bill by 15 to 50 percent, just by having a different company name on the tag of a chef coat, that's huge. Our cost analysis we do is fact-based and will show savings down to a percentage and a dollar value, both by invoice and annually.



MM Does Canadian Linen offer other services beyond linen rental and delivery to restaurants?

BR: *They also offer full washroom management supply, including toilet paper, paper towel, hand soaps, and air fresheners. They also offer health and safety compliant first aid kits and reflective vests for staff who may have to walk across facility parking lots to drop off waste. Items like these are available through the direct sale program, which is also eligible for Groupex rebates.*

MM What level of customization does Canadian Linen offer to restaurants?

BR: *If a restaurant has seasonal fluctuations in their business, they can adjust product orders—they're not forced into a volume commitment. In terms of brand customization, restaurants can get custom floor mats created with their logo, at a similar cost to a plain mat. Logos can be screened or embroidered on chef coats too. Direct sale coats and cloths are available in a range of colours, and rentals are generally black and white.*

MM What are the benefits of a uniform program for restaurants, as opposed to simply managing linen in house?

BR: *One of the biggest advantages is that you know your staff will always work in clean, crisp uniform garments. Soiled garments are picked up weekly with clean garments delivered on hangers at the same time. The uniform program also protects staff members' personal clothing from damage from stains and grease. They have fresh uniforms waiting for them when they arrive and then they leave them at the end of the day, so you don't have to worry how staff are going to look if they're in front of customers.*

MM How does the service reduce costs and how does it all work?

BR: *There is no up-front cost to set up a program, and Canadian Linen will purchase or provide all of the linens a customer will need on the operator's behalf. Restaurants start with the weekly rental, choosing how many of each product they need and start the service, which includes the rental, pickup and delivery.*

MM Would foodservice operators get the same pricing through Canadian Linen if they contacted them directly, as opposed to through Groupex membership?

BR: *No. With over 1,100 Groupex members using the service, we have negotiated national pricing based on our volume for independent restaurants. They also take advantage of our price surety and our rebate on top of that pricing. Canadian Linen's been around for over 125 years. They know what they're doing. They're the industry leaders in Canada for sure, and a lot of our members appreciate that Groupex deals with a Canadian-owned linen company.*

MM When you meet with your clients, are they surprised by the total value membership with Groupex offers?

BR: *Yes, it's funny, but that's my biggest hurdle to signing a new member. They say it sounds too good to be true and ask, "What's the catch?". And then, when I throw in that Groupex is owned by a not-for-profit, that we're transparent, we're here for our members, and that any profits we do make goes to our parent company, Restaurants Canada to lobby the government on the industry's behalf, it's very meaningful. We're not a multinational company making money for international shareholders. Every dollar we make stays in Canada to support the hospitality industry.*

groupex CANADA

Established in 1984 by a small group of independent restaurants, today, Groupex is the largest foodservice account in Canada with some of the leading branded suppliers such as Pepsico, Diversey, Canada Bread and Gordon Food Service. Groupex uses the buying power of its national membership base to negotiate savings on essential restaurant supplies and services. Members save thousands of dollars on beverages, food, operational and financial programs.

Learn more at:
groupex.com

The Delivery Revolution:

Navigating Canada's Evolving Foodservice Landscape







BY CHRIS SZEGO

The pandemic transformed Canada's food delivery landscape, ushering in the age of delivery with online orders increasing by 36 per cent[1] in the first year. This surge reshaped not only how Canadians eat but also what they expect from their dining experiences. Notably, alcohol delivery saw relaxed regulations across most provinces, a shift some have made permanent, recognizing the blend of necessity and astute advocacy that drove these changes.

Even as restaurants welcome patrons back, the reliance on third-party delivery platforms persists, driven now more by convenience than necessity. In 2023, 25 per cent of Canadians dined out at least once a week,[2] exploring new restaurants and foods, and enjoying the ease of repeated orders, which now extend beyond restaurant meals to include meal kits and groceries—one of the strongest rising segments of the third-party delivery market.

Generation Z is at the forefront of this digital dining revolution, leading in frequency of online orders and showing a marked preference for sustainable dining options—from eco-friendly packaging to ethical food sourcing.

The convenience and reach offered by delivery platforms have proven invaluable, allowing restaurateurs to expand their customer base with minimal effort and by pass the hefty startup costs of traditional delivery services. This shift enables operators to focus on what truly matters: food quality and customer experience.

Of course, there are also some disadvantages, the most prominent being high service fees. Already squeezed by rising ingredient and labour costs, operators are understandably hesitant to lose up to 30 per cent on each order. The lack of control once an order leaves the premises is also a concern—delays and disruptions are often unfairly attributed to the restaurant rather than the delivery service.

Looking ahead, industry experts at Technomic forecast a more stable growth





trajectory for the foodservice sector post the turbulent recent years. Their "2024 Global Restaurant Trends Forecast "[3] and "What's in Store for 2024 in Canadian Foodservice"[4] reports highlight key trends:

TERRITORIAL SHIFTS: Takeout and drive-through services are set to encroach on traditional delivery zones.

MEAL TIMING: As dinner sales decline, the popularity of breakfast and brunch is expected to rise.

TECH INTEGRATION: Ongoing enhancements in technology will further integrate kitchen operations with online ordering systems.

SPENDING POWER: Generation Z is projected to account for over a quarter of demographic spending, leading the charge in consumption trends.

As Canada grapples with economic uncertainties and the impacts of climate change, the evolution of delivery services continues to offer a window into the future of dining, promising a blend of innovation and convenience tailored to the Canadian palate.

Third-party delivery companies are enhancing support for restaurants to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship, as their success is closely tied to that of the dining establishments they serve. The highly competitive nature of the delivery market compels these companies to offer better terms and more sophisticated programs to attract and retain restaurant partners. Additionally, consumer demand for ethical practices, regulatory pressures, and the economic impact of the pandemic on the restaurant industry motivate delivery companies to provide more substantial support. These efforts not only improve their public image and compliance with potential regulations, but also secure a stable supply of partners crucial for their operational model.

Skip Offers Exclusive Partnerships & Invests in Recognizing Women in Foodservice

According to Skip, more than half of Canadians use their delivery app. Commonly known as "Skip", the homegrown delivery platform was founded in Saskatoon in 2012. Currently Skip has offices in Winnipeg, Calgary and Toronto, and every day they connect Canadians to over 50,000 restaurant partners in Canada, including a growing offering of groceries, retailers, alcohol and convenience stores from coast to coast.

Skip also connects with their restaurant partners, several of whom they invited to RC Show 2024 to share their unique business models and the experiences and successes they've had through partnerships with Skip.

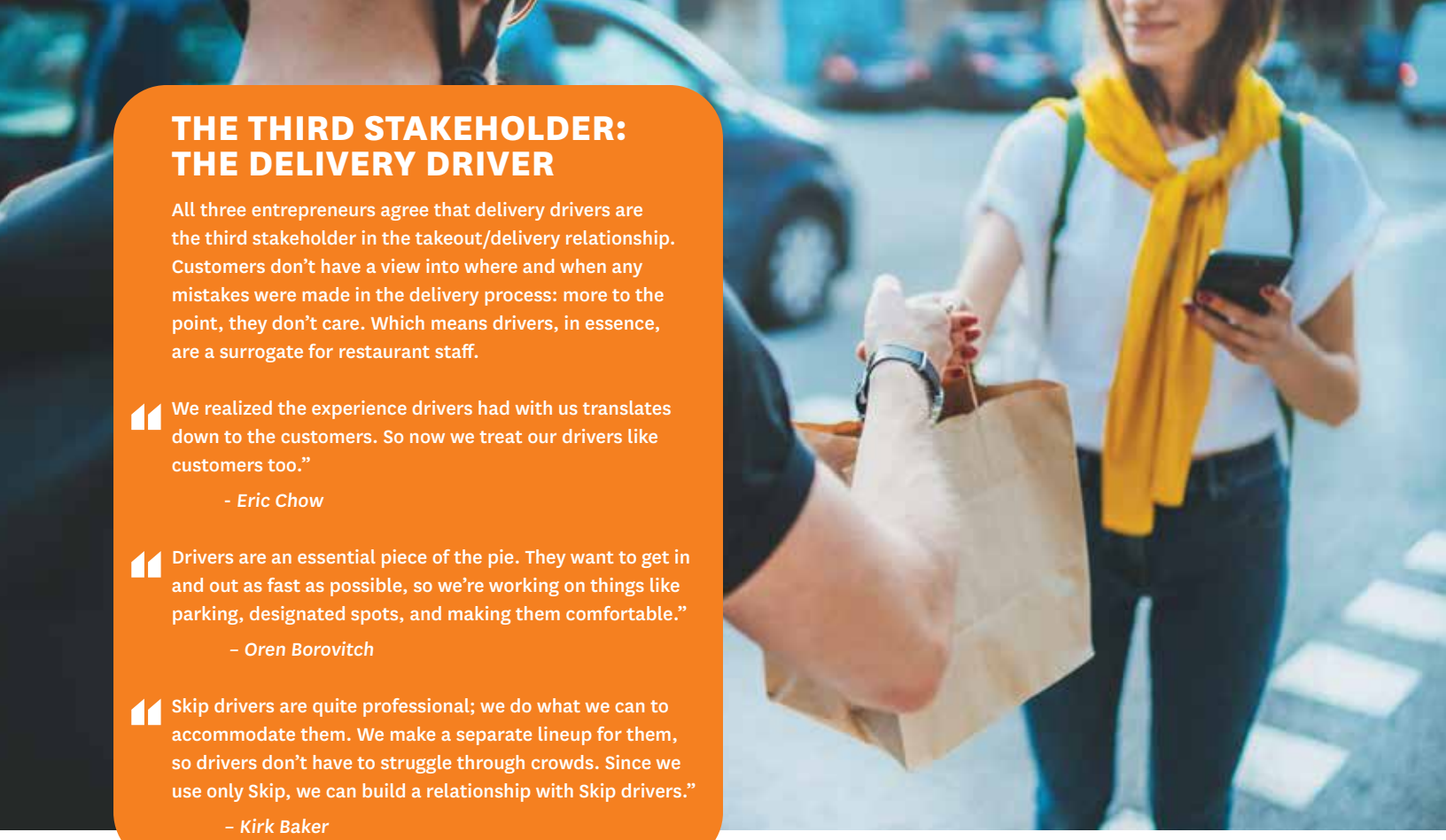
A SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH

Kirk Baker is the owner of Baker's Jerk, a Caribbean eatery encompassing two restaurants, three food trucks and soon, a 6,000 square foot warehouse. Their new space will largely be dedicated to the production of their famous Jamaican House patties.

Kirk and his wife Diane began their Brampton, Ontario-based enterprise in 2007. Leaders in the field, they give back to the community by mentoring high-school co-op students. The winner of multiple JerkFest competitions, Baker's Jerk now has an exclusive delivery partnership with Skip. "I've tried other delivery companies," says Kirk, "But they don't compare."

With only one platform to navigate, Kirk can concentrate on his business. "Working with Skip gives me the chance to focus on my product, and to connect with Skip one-on-one. Problems get solved very quickly." Customized support from his account manager, who has a background in restaurants, has created an honest and meaningful relationship. "They work with me on promotions, which can be very fun to do. I recently had a two-week promotion. At the end of it, my bank app amazed me."

> **"They work with me on promotions, which can be very fun to do. I recently had a two-week promotion. At the end of it, my bank app amazed me."**
>
> Kirk Baker, Baker's Jerk



THE THIRD STAKEHOLDER: THE DELIVERY DRIVER

All three entrepreneurs agree that delivery drivers are the third stakeholder in the takeout/delivery relationship. Customers don't have a view into where and when any mistakes were made in the delivery process: more to the point, they don't care. Which means drivers, in essence, are a surrogate for restaurant staff.

> We realized the experience drivers had with us translates down to the customers. So now we treat our drivers like customers too."
>
> *- Eric Chow*

> Drivers are an essential piece of the pie. They want to get in and out as fast as possible, so we're working on things like parking, designated spots, and making them comfortable."
>
> *– Oren Borovitch*

> Skip drivers are quite professional; we do what we can to accommodate them. We make a separate lineup for them, so drivers don't have to struggle through crowds. Since we use only Skip, we can build a relationship with Skip drivers."
>
> *– Kirk Baker*

CHANGING THE GAME

Oren Borovitch grew up in the foodservice industry, working for and managing his family's foodservice businesses. "I worked pretty much every position," he recalls. After a stint as a restaurant strategist with a delivery company, Oren co-founded Kitchen Hub, Canada's first virtual food hall, with partners Mat Abramsky and Adam Aremeland in 2019, opening their first location in Toronto's Liberty Village neighbourhood. "We were looking for a way to make takeout simple and delivery more exciting."

Well-known brands share customized kitchen space in three locations—they have since opened in Castlefield and Maple, Ontario—while Kitchen Hub handles operations and front-of-house. Skip helps Kitchen Hub provide order transparency, to ensure that the customer experience comes first. Skip also provides invaluable data to drive strategic planning for the future, Oren points out. "We can ask Skip 'Where are customers not being served?', and our next location will come from the data."

Oren's goal is to help restaurant operators succeed in the digital economy. "I know it's challenging to make a profit in foodservice," he says, acknowledging that Skip is, and will continue to be, a central part of Kitchen Hub's growth strategy.

SHARING THE STAGE

Skip also recently partnered with Women's Executive Network (WXN) to launch a new category in Canada's Most Powerful Women: Top 100™ Awards. The SkipTheDishes Food Industry Award will celebrate outstanding women in foodservice and shine a spotlight on the many talented female chefs, restaurateurs and entrepreneurs in the sector who demonstrate resilience, entrepreneurship and excellence.

The award will both acknowledge women in leadership roles and inspire others to pursue similar career paths. Melanie Fatouros-Richardson, Vice President, Communications and Government Relations at Skip, is proud of the difference the company will make. "We'll show young women what's possible, while also helping to pave a future where there are greater opportunities for women in leadership in the food industry."

MAKING IT WORK

Restaurant operators can find significant advantages by partnering with Skip. Tailored to each individual business model, these collaborations streamline operations by consolidating delivery services into an efficient platform, reducing overhead and simplifying logistics. This focused approach not only enhances operational efficiency but can also lead to fewer errors and better customer service.

Already this year, Skip has invested over $851,000 across their network of independently owned restaurant partners to help them achieve their business goals, offering subsidiary programs such as their BOGO and $ Off promo campaigns operators can activate directly from their dashboards. These promotional supports have emerged as one of Skip's competitive strengths, and also include preferred listing in searches to help attract a larger customer base. Skip's advanced data analytics provide valuable consumer insights to help restaurants engage new audiences through tailored menus and marketing strategies designed to boost profitability and intersect with the evolving tastes and preferences of their customers.

THE MARKETPLACE

INSPIRE · INNOVATE · EMPOWER



Technology is Sexy but Customer Experience is King.

The world is moving faster than ever before with a rush to deploy the latest and greatest technologies but don't take your eyes off the most important factor in the long term success of your business - **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**.

Field Agent's mobile app is revolutionizing the way restaurants connect with their customers across Canada and with over **285,000 Canadian users**, they bridge the gap between you, your restaurants and your customers - **Anywhere! Anytime!**

Whether you operate a QSR, a FSR, or an upscale Fine Dining venue, **Field Agent's Mystery Shopping Solution** delivers rapid, budget-friendly feedback drawn from genuine customer interactions. From service standards to actionable insights that drive business growth, and valuable market research.

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www.fieldagentcanada.com/rc | foodservice@fieldagentcanada.com



KEENON

Since 2010, KEENON Robotics, driven by its slogan "Keen on robots, keen on the future,"

has led the robotics sector. With a comprehensive range including advertising, delivery, hotel, and the latest addition, cleaning robots, they cater to diverse commercial needs. Rapid growth in Canada reflects the continual pursuit of efficiency and profitability in businesses. The debut of their new all-in-one model, Dinerbot T10, at this year's RC Show, presents an ideal option for those seeking to enhance the customer experience.

For more information, please contact: global@keenon.com
For national distribution, please contact E-Pro Bot Inc. at:
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