

CERTIFICATION

Mastering the Art of Cooking: My Journey to Certified Master Chef® (CMC)®

By Robert J. Mancuso, CMC®

My journey began when I was a student at The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., from 1988 to 1990. I observed some of the members of 1988 ACF Culinary Team USA crafting their artful presentations as they practiced for the *Internationale Kochkunst Ausstellung* in Frankfurt, Germany. Peering through the glass, my roommate, Daniel Dumont, CMC, and I witnessed certified master chefs at their best. That was the experience that ignited our culinary journey.

After graduation, Dan and I were fortunate to work for David Kellaway, CMC, at the highly acclaimed Salish Lodge in Snoqualmie, Wash. At that point in our careers, we were determined to secure a spot on 1996 ACF Culinary Team USA. After countless hours of competing in hot food and cold food arenas, we conquered the tryout process and made the team.

Becoming a certified master chef had always been a goal of mine, but the timing had to be right. It was 2006 when I finally committed wholeheartedly to pursuing the designation. I started the application process, but had to wait for the next exam date to be released. In May 2009, a few other candidates and I attended an assessment session in Cincinnati, which was intended to measure our skill and solidify our future path. CMCs were on hand to demonstrate correct techniques, critique participants and offer advice in preparation for the next exam. This turned out to be one of the most significant cooking experiences of my career—a chance to cook for CMCs. I left Cincinnati with my head held high and a new vigor that helped with my final preparations.

By this point, I had secured a team of CMCs as advisors and coaches for the exam, which provided the continued support that would, ultimately, lead to my success. I believe it's an extremely important part of the process to be able to share your recipe development with individuals who have been successful at achieving the designation. My practice schedule began at least a year out and continued up to the day I departed for the exam.

My experience during the exam was unparalleled to anything I had done before. There were many peaks and valleys, the peaks being extremely high and the valleys extremely low. However, as I embarked on the final stages of the process, there were some pivotal moments. I felt as though I hit my stride on Day 5, and actually relaxed a bit and started to enjoy the experience. Baking and Pastry was a great day for me. With overall scores in the upper 90s, I was pleased with my performance. My philosophy for baking and pastry was simple: Develop your own stellar program, taking advantage of the fact that there is no mystery basket. This was my chance to increase my average score. Global and Northern European were equally enjoyable, but extra practice was necessary to feel comfortable with those styles of cuisine.

The execution of the finer points involved in great cuisine, kitchen organization, butchery, knife skills, menu development, product utilization, cooking methodology, sanitation, and refined presentation with integrity and intent are, ultimately, the focus. Mastering



these aspects will result in delicious food that will eventually lead to success.

Looking back, words truly cannot describe the task I have just accomplished. The overall success of the certified master chef exam is a true testament to one's perseverance and dedication to the craft. I am delighted to be in such great company.

In closing, I must say that I could not have accomplished this task without the extraordinary support of my wife Nadine, who deserves her own pin for the most caring, patient and loving wife in the world.

Robert Mancuso is executive chef at The Country Club, Chestnut Hill, Mass.

CONGRATULATIONS TO MANCUSO AND THE FOLLOWING 2010 CMCs:

- **Brian Beland, CMC**, executive chef, Country Club of Detroit, Grosse Point Farms, Mich.
- **Daniel Dumont, CMC**, corporate chef, Ocean Properties Ltd. Hotels and Resorts, Portsmouth, N.H.
- **Richard Rosendale, CMC**, executive chef, The Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.
- **Brian Sode, CMC**, executive chef, The Bear's Club, Jupiter, Fla.



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