

CERTIFICATION

Different Paths to ACF Certification

Many enter the culinary industry for the simple reason that they love cooking and the excitement and camaraderie of the kitchen. In a recent interview, Timothy Prefontaine, CEC, executive chef at The Fort Worth Club, Fort Worth, Texas, talked about his certification journey and the influences that shaped his career.

What does ACF certification mean to you?

I made ACF certification one of my personal goals early on in my career. Certification has been a great way to measure what I have learned and has given me greater self-confidence. Initially, I certified as a Certified Culinarian®, and then upgraded to Certified Sous Chef™. I continued to grow and upgraded my certification again, and currently I am a Certified Executive Chef®. Certification not only demonstrates proven skills, but shows employers that a chef is continually advancing his or her skills and knowledge.

How did your certification journey begin?

While in high school, I spent four years working in a busy local restaurant. After high school, I was accepted in the ACF apprenticeship program at The Balsams Grand Resort, Dixville Notch, N.H. I spent three intense years working all aspects of the kitchen, from butchering to bakeshop. I completed six internships at other resorts and restaurants around country and in the Caribbean. As an apprentice, I had the good fortune to study under Phil Learned, CEC, AAC, HOF, and Stephen James, CMB. Their influence and my apprenticeship experience gave me a solid foundation on which to build my career and my goals. While at The Balsams, we had several in-house competitions among the apprentices. We then put together a team and competed at

state and national levels. After those first few competitions, I knew I wanted to compete more, and I made it one of my future goals.

To pursue my goals, I decided I needed to find a chef and an environment where I could hone my skills as well as learn new ones. I was put in touch with Charles Carroll, CEC, AAC. He offered me a starting position as a cook, so I packed my car and drove to Houston. Six years later, I can say without hesitation that it was an opportunity of a lifetime. After that, I realized I finally had what it took to be an executive chef.

Who has inspired you?

I had the basics instilled in me from the beginning, such as organization, quality, proper cooking methods and cleanliness. I have been fortunate in my career to have trained under some truly talented certified chefs. With Chef Carroll, I was able to practice all the basics I had learned and take them to a new level. I am truly thankful to other chefs, including Hans Schadler, CEC, AAC, Dean Moore, Edward Leonard, CMC, WGMC, AAC, and Steven Jilleba, CMC, CCE, AAC, who have inspired me and helped me build the foundation from which I am building my career.

Was there a pivotal point in your career?

My life changed when I was selected for ACF Culinary Regional Team USA in 2006. This opportunity opened up a whole new world of friendships, knowledge and life experiences. When I heard about the team tryouts, I thought I would give it a shot. I made the team, and since then my experiences have included the American Culinary Classic in 2007, the *Internationale Kochkunst Ausstellung* (IKA) in 2008 and recently, the Villeroy & Boch Culinary World Cup in Luxembourg as a member of ACF Culinary



Prefontaine

National Team USA. Probably the greatest thing about being on Team USA is the relationships with teammates and coaches. I have learned so much from these chefs, and I look forward to working with them over the next two years as we get ready for the 2012 IKA.

Describe your certification journey?

I made some tough decisions along the way, never taking the easy road, but I was determined to set myself up for success. When I moved to Houston, I started taking my career more seriously. I was starting at the bottom, and there was nowhere to go but up. I wanted it more than anyone else, and if I was patient, I knew I would get more opportunities. My mantra was to always work harder than the person next to me at whatever position I was in, strive to be better than my teacher and soak up as much as possible. I was always striving to be recognized as a great chef.

Certification advice for others?

Certification tests your culinary skill and knowledge and promotes continuing education. I would encourage others to be practical, write down measurable goals and read them daily. There is a lot to learn, but no matter what, give 110% and prove to yourself that anything is possible. Not only is certification rewarding personally, but employers look favorably on certified chefs who keep up-to-date on the industry. It's been a great journey.

