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PLATED PERFECTION



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ACF PIKES PEAK CHAPTER CO023

By John Bartimole

The ACF Pikes Peak Chapter, recipient of the 2022 ACF Western Region Chapter of the Year Award, is one of the longest-running chapters in the country, tracing its history back more than 40 years to the late 1970s.

The chapter — now the only remaining one in the state of Colorado following the close of the Denver chapter during the height of the pandemic — is expanding its offerings to fill the void and to continue to provide education, training and philanthropy to the community.

A centerpiece of that philanthropy is the chapter's yearly Passport Event, a tasting event that raises money for a specific charity. This year, the chapter was able to revive the event, which had been dormant due to the pandemic, with a creative twist.

"We decided to expand the passport idea to create a pseudo-airport where attendees had to go through security, walk up a gangplank, etc., to visit the 13 chefs and restaurants who were displaying their goods," says **Chef John Casto III, CEC**, Pikes Peak chapter president. "We sold 260 tickets to the event, and we could have sold many more, but we were at capacity. It was great watching our guests walk from chef to chef, getting their 'passports' stamped as they visited each. It was a wonderful opportunity for our chefs to demonstrate their skills, and, importantly, we were able to raise \$5,000 to give to the Skills Academy [Vocational Center] in Colorado Springs. The



At last year's Pike Peak chapter holiday party, Angie Hopkins (center, wearing the medallion) was awarded with the chapter's ACF Student Chef of the Year title.

The Pikes Peak Chapter Officers

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Chef John Casto III, CEC

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Chef Bill Thompson

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Sergeant of Arms

Chef Angie Hopkins

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Chef Kathy Anderson, CC®

academy works with developmentally disabled adults to teach life skills, including cooking."

Culinary School Connections

Chef Casto recognizes the challenges facing his chapter and the industry in general, and he and his fellow members work to address those issues.

"I've turned over my whole staff twice in just the last three weeks," he says. "And supply chain issues continue — I haven't been able to get a turkey in two weeks."

But one of the more vexing — and pressing — problems the chapter must address, he says, is the dwindling number of educational institutions teaching culinary arts.

"Pueblo Community College will no longer offer the culinary arts in its curriculum," Chef Casto says. "We implored them not to close the program. Even Johnson & Wales discontinued its program in Denver."

Chapter leaders are working with Pueblo Community College to convince the college to reassess that status. “We very much hope they come back,” Chef Casto says. “We have offered to begin an apprenticeship program for the college, and we just received a grant for that program.”

Casting a Wider Net

Still, with the number of educational avenues dwindling, Chef Casto knows it’s important for the chapter to recruit newcomers to the industry. “So, it’s incumbent upon us to really emphasize attracting young people to the profession,” he says. “We look for the passion in their eyes and bring them into the culinary arts. And we very much stress the importance of ACF certification. In fact, our chapter has had 16 chefs who have received certification in the last couple of years.”

Chef Casto recognizes the importance of casting a wider net and being as inclusive as possible. Even amid a return to in-person events, “it only seems logical to have meetings available on Zoom,” he says. “And that’s brought some moderate success. We’re also trying to do meet-and-greets at certain locations to continue to expand our reach.” In October 2021, the chapter held a meeting in Denver to cater to the displaced Denver chapter members.

“One of the core values of the ACF is networking,” he adds. “And we are reaching out to include as many of our Colorado chefs as possible.”

Continuing Education

Chef Casto also recognizes the importance of continuing education for his members.

“Our demonstration programs are very popular and successful,” he says. “We held a really good butcher class and an excellent ravioli-making class. It was great to see the chefs getting their hands on the pasta and seeing and experiencing the process from start to finish.”

For Chef Casto, being a chef — and the thread that continues to connect chefs — is all about the camaraderie and the networking.

“Let’s face it,” he says. “Chefs are chefs. That’s what we are. We understand each other. We know the challenges. Our profession is real, it’s honest and it’s meaningful. We are in it for people and food and helping each other. The connection we make with food and with each other is powerful. We are always looking at how can we impact our colleagues and our community day today.”



At the Pikes Peak chapter’s annual Passport Event for charity, guests went through a pseudo-airport security checkpoint; Chapter President John Casto, CEC (top row, third from left) with chapter members and guest chefs at a recent event.