

FOODSERVICE EAST PRESENTS

SECRETS OF **SUCCESS**

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An ongoing series of interviews with chefs, restaurateurs and foodservice operators, Secrets of Success looks at the paths taken to professional recognition and acclaim.



William Reardon

**Executive Chef, VIVO Seasonal Trattoria, Marriott Hartford Downtown
By Foodservice East**

Executive Chef William Reardon began his culinary career at Salvatore's Italian Restaurant in Springfield, MA and later joined his family's restaurant offering American cuisine. He also was lead cook at Hofbrauhaus in West Springfield doing classic Bavarian fare. He recently won the American Culinary Federation's Achievement of Excellence Award for his commitment to excellence.

FOODSERVICE EAST SECRETS OF SUCCESS

FSE: What is it like to win a major ACF award?

REARDON: Winning an award such as the ACF Award of Excellence was a great honor and very humbling at the same time. When you go to receive this award, you are surrounded by your peers and they are the best of the best, truly. You see the Culinary Olympic Teams, Certified Master Chefs, Celebrity Chefs, etc., all in the same room. It was very gratifying to be with some of the most talented chefs from around the world and have them reach out their hands to offer congratulations. I will definitely regard it as one of the high points of my career.

FSE: How did you decide to become a chef and what were the early influences on your culinary style?

REARDON: Ironically, I started working in restaurants at the age of 15 as a busboy and worked my way through being a dishwasher, prep cook and then cold stations. My family also owned and operated a restaurant but it wasn't until years later when I was dining in a classic New England style cuisine restaurant that I thought of making culinary my career choice. I was so impressed with the quality of that meal that I still remember it to this day. It was great food that was done simply but had you wanting more.

FSE: Who were your mentors?

REARDON: I have had numerous people that I would consider to be mentors ranging from my first culinary instructor to the last chef I worked under, but my parents who taught me to have a strong work ethic have always been the most important to me. Over the years I have worked alongside many different people who've passed along their knowledge, some of it was good and some wasn't so good. But I value all of it. Some of the things I learned were due to someone else's mistakes or shortcuts in quality but there was still a lesson learned in the end.

FSE: What's the 'secret' of your success?

REARDON: It goes back to work ethic. If you work hard, stay humble and be sure to surround yourself with great people who support, encourage and push you in the right direction, the rest will come in due time.

FSE: What advice do you give to culinary students?

REARDON: Today's students have to appreciate hard work and realize that it's not going to be a 9 to 5 job. I think some of the best cooks out there have risen through the ranks of a kitchen from the bottom up and have never been too proud to scrub a pot or pan. Culinary school is a short cut that teaches you the right way to do things so you don't have to learn everything through trial and error. That being said, schooling is only the foundation of cooking and students still have to learn that this a career that requires dedication to not only themselves but more importantly, the guests that they will service.

FSE: What was it like working in a family operation?

REARDON: I realize now that I should've worked harder at learning the business of running a restaurant. It was good to be able to help out, but I was young and

probably didn't put nearly enough effort in trying to learn more about the business side of it. I definitely enjoyed my time there and still have great memories of the food. My father had the best pastrami around (my favorite). Even to this day I haven't found any better.

FSE: What are the biggest challenges in your job and how do you meet them?

REARDON: This is a hectic business and at times it can seem as if everything is coming at you like a curve ball. Guests' needs change constantly. Items are shipped to us incorrectly. You have to see through the distractions to find the solutions and it can be a struggle to juggle and prioritize the day's needs. But with the right team and perseverance, we meet those very challenges head on every day.

FSE: If you weren't a chef, what would you enjoy doing?

REARDON: Besides buying a bigger boat and retiring somewhere on a hammock? I would enjoy owning and operating a vineyard. That's still on my bucket list.

FSE: What are the factors that have led you to excel?

REARDON: Hard work, dedication and remaining very humble have been three major factors in my success. I am very hands on and even though much of my job puts me at a desk for parts of the day, I need to be in the kitchen cooking and creating. I try to lead by their side if that makes sense.

FSE: How do you balance the demands on your time as a hotel chef between VIVO, catering, room service, banquets, etc.?

REARDON: I'm thankful to be surrounded by such a great team – an exceptional banquet chef and a talented executive sous chef who help me manage the day to day operations. The kitchen is designed so almost all the food for these different outlets is prepped and cooked out of one main kitchen central to the hotel's operations and this lets me be in direct contact with all food handled throughout the hotel each day and night and gives me the time to focus on staff needs, purchasing, menu concepts, catering, meetings, etc. Basically you need to be skillful at multi-tasking.

FSE: Do you cook at home and if so, what's in your refrigerator?

REARDON: I do much more cooking at home during the colder months. It's the best time for braised dishes and the vegetables are great as well. If you were to look in my refrigerator today, you would find hummus, yogurt, and much of what's in everyone else's refrigerator. Lately I've been hooked on a place a friend recommended to me where they have great wine, their own fresh pasta selections and amazing sauces that you can pair your dish with. Why stay home with so many great restaurants out there?