

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.



Gerald Hunter

**Executive Chef, Parkhurst Dining Services
By Foodservice East**

When Executive Chef Gerald Hunter at Philadelphia University, a Parkhurst account, first meet a student with celiac disease, his immediate response was to want to make the student feel comfortable and “not left out when she came into the café.” Today, he views making gluten-free options part of offering a healthier lifestyle for everyone.

FOODSERVICE EAST SECRETS OF SUCCESS

FSE: When did you begin to see a growing demand for gluten-free menu items from students?

HUNTER: I would say about seven or eight years ago. I was introduced to a student with celiac disease and her parents, who were very concerned about their daughter being able to eat safely. I was able to educate myself on the limitations of someone with celiac disease and alter some everyday items to accommodate her and any others that might also need or prefer gluten-free products. One example is using cornstarch in place of flour as a thickening agent in all soups and gravies so that they can be gluten-free, depending on the other ingredients.

FSE: What's driving that trend?

HUNTER: I think gluten-free has become a popular and more healthy way to eat. I do not think it is all necessarily allergy-related, but all items we prepare are treated as if there is an allergy.

FSE: What percentage of students have food allergies/issues?

HUNTER: I believe as a chef I am only introduced to a small percent of students and those that have severe allergy problems. We are diligent about labeling all products with peanuts, shellfish and gluten. We also make sure that the staff is aware of all ingredients in the menu items that day to be able to answer any allergy-related questions.

FSE: How did you come to decide to be a chef? Were you interested in food as a child?

HUNTER: I have worked in the kitchen from a very young age and developed a strong interest in the field by watching and learning from others in the kitchen.

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

HUNTER: Consistency and a good work ethic.

FSE: What is the hardest part of offering gluten-free options?

HUNTER: Educating the staff on serving and advertising gluten-free products, and also, making the customers aware and confident that the items we advertise as gluten-free are safe for them to eat.

FSE: Is there a kitchen tool you couldn't live without?

HUNTER: Yes, the burr mixer.

FSE: What would you like to be doing 10 years from now?

HUNTER: I'd like to grow with Parkhurst Dining and one day become a regional district manager.

FSE: What's the most rewarding aspect of being a chef on a college/university campus?

HUNTER: Helping today's youth understand the importance of healthy, made from scratch food and receiving compliments on serving them consistently good food on a daily basis are very rewarding.

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

HUNTER: Lucky for me, my wife takes over the cooking duties at home. In my refrigerator you will always find pickles, hot peppers and beer ☺.