

FOODSERVICE EAST PRESENTS

# SECRETS OF **SUCCESS**

February 2014

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



## **Bob Luz**

**Massachusetts Restaurant Association, Southborough, MA  
By Foodservice East**

Bob Luz decided he was a “Bostonian at heart” while working for American Blue Ribbon Holdings in Nashville, the owners of Ninety Nine Restaurants. He talked with his wife about moving there, but at the end of the day, Boston was home. They returned full time.

# FOODSERVICE EAST SECRETS OF SUCCESS

**FSE: You've spent major segments of your career in the restaurant industry in the Northeast – with Applebee's in New England, Ninety Nine Restaurants, Back Bay Restaurant Group, and now, as president and CEO of the Massachusetts Restaurant Association. What led you to return?**

LUZ: I was confident I would find a fun, challenging position...and that I did.

**FSE: Much of your career has been spent in the area of human resources. What do you see as the biggest challenges in that field today? Labor has always been one of the restaurant industry's key concerns. How has this changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

LUZ: Finding great people, and then most importantly developing and retaining those star performers, can be the pivotal difference between a good restaurant and a great restaurant. That is the way this game has always been played because at the end of the day we often buy the same product from the same business partners, we cook it on the same grill or in the same oven, but it is the relationship that our staff has with our guests from the front door and throughout the whole restaurant that can often differentiate and make great dining experiences.

**FSE: What are the challenges for MRA in building membership and serving restaurants in an ever more competitive environment?**

LUZ: I honestly cannot think of another point in our lifetime where membership in the MRA is more critical than it is today—and I'm not saying that because I am now the head of the MRA. The legislative agenda and the rapidly changing compliance affecting our business is dizzying, and those are some of the key deliverables we provide our membership with so that they can continue to do what they do best, deliver great food and beverage that exceeds the guest's expectations.

**FSE: How did you decided to choose a career in the hospitality industry?**

LUZ: Pretty easy answer. I graduated from UMASS Amherst with a degree in Hospitality Management, and my father asked me what I was going to do next. I told him I was going to give the restaurant business

a try because it seemed like a natural extension of college, and I would stay with it as long as I kept having fun. Thirty-three years later, I am still having a blast every single day.

**FSE: What kinds of restaurants do you most enjoy when you go out to eat?**

LUZ: We have 1,800 members representing 5,500 restaurants so I have 5,500 favorites.

**FSE: How would you describe your 'secret' of success?**

LUZ: My secret of success has always been hiring really good people who are smarter than me who fit the culture of our company very well and then let them do their thing. My role is not to micro-manage the team but rather to help set the goals, listen, and try to remove the obstacles the team encounters along the way. Together we win, individually, we fail.

**FSE: What are your goals in this new position with MRA?**

LUZ: To increase our members' level of satisfaction with the services that MRA provides to them. We completed a satisfaction survey just after I started that pointed out a number of things we did really, really well, as well as pointing out some opportunities. We have quickly worked to begin to address those areas while still maintaining the aspects we were told were core competencies.

**FSE: What do you do for "R & R"?**

LUZ: There is nothing better than a cigar and some beach bocce on Long Sands Beach in York, ME.