

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.



Micaela Cullinan

General Manager, Metropolis Cafe, Boston, MA
By Foodservice East

Micaela Cullinan grew up in the foodservice industry with parents who met while working in a restaurant, and are still in the business. It came naturally for her to gravitate to a career path that led to her current role as g.m. of one of Boston's favorite neighborhood dining spots, but she still remembers her very first job.

FOODSERVICE EAST SECRETS OF SUCCESS

FSE: What led you into the restaurant industry and what's your background?

CULLINAN: My parents met working in a restaurant and are still in the business, so it's always been a part of my life. My first job at 16 was at Weathervane Seafoods in Bedford, NH as the "numbers girl". I was the person you saw first, who gave you your "number" to get on the list. I've had many roles in the restaurant business since then, but that job introduced me to hospitality, both the rewarding and difficult parts of it. I've never considered doing anything else.

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

CULLINAN: Keeping the passion alive.

FSE: What led up to the recent renovations at Metropolis?

CULLINAN: After 19 years we decided Metropolis needed a little "love" and that it was time to make some of the changes we had been talking about and dreaming about for years.

FSE: What were the biggest challenges and what was the timeframe?

CULLINAN: We wanted to do it in the shortest time possible. Our primary goal was to not be closed to the neighborhood for any significant length of time, so the biggest challenge was coordinating all the contractors. We did what we could while still being open, so we were closed for just four days. It meant long days and nights, but it was worth it.

FSE: What kinds of changes were made?

CULLINAN: Paint, lighting, tabletops, bar - We wanted to make some significant changes without losing the "essence" of Metropolis, so there was a lot of discussion about how to achieve that. The feedback I get is that we pulled that off, so I'm really pleased with the results.

FSE: were there changes made to the back of the house as well as the front?

CULLINAN: No. There is not much you can do in a space that tight. I like to compare Metropolis' kitchen to a '71 Chevy Nova, there are no bells and whistles, there are only about six moving parts. You

keep those parts clean and in good working order and you get amazing results.

FSE: Was the menu changed at all as part of the "refresh"?

CULLINAN: Yes and no. We changed the format, which allowed us to add items we'd been wanting to, but the old favorites stayed. We have always done seasonal changes, and continue to do so.

FSE: How has the industry changed here in Boston in the past five years or so?

CULLINAN: Where our city has come in the last 15 years is incredible. The level of excellence and creativity that is displayed in all of the great places that have opened has really elevated Boston to a world-class dining city. It's been an amazing process to be a part of.

FSE: What do you see as the biggest challenge for restaurants today?

CULLINAN: To deliver a consistently excellent product and connect with the guest.

FSE: What was it like to win Boston Magazine's "Best Neighborhood Restaurant" award?

CULLINAN: In a neighborhood like the South End where you are literally surrounded by award winning and all around great restaurants, it was humbling and truly an honor.

FSE: Where do you enjoy eating when you go out?

CULLINAN: Our sister restaurant Gaslight is one of my favorites, and I'm addicted to the French Onion Soup at Aquitaine. Coppa can't be beat and Myers and Chang is always one of my "go to" places.