

Secrets of Success

an online exclusive from Foodservice East

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



Growing up in the restaurant industry, Barry Gutin, president and CEO of Libre Management in Philadelphia, learned firsthand about hospitality. A student at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, he graduated Summa Cum Laude and went on to hone his skills at several Mid-Atlantic operations including Pulsations Nightclub /Encore Dinner Theater and Hotel in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania and Taylor's Nightclub in Cherry Hill, NJ.

He also provided marketing and operational consulting services to restaurants, bars and clubs and opened several successful restaurants of his own before creating Max & Me Catering which today, handles some 600-plus events a year and is the exclusive culinary provider at such Philadelphia institutions, cultural sites and historic buildings as the National Constitution Center and Independence Visitors Center. Gutin forecasts a doubling of his business in the next year.

This fall, Max & Me takes its restaurant-style catering capabilities to the 132-year-old National Historic Landmark, Memorial Hall, which will re-open housing the Please Touch Museum for children as well as 12 distinctive event settings, with 156,000 sq. ft. of space. One space will a restored antique carousel, while the Great Hall with 60 ft. ceilings and a majestic dome can handle receptions for up to 450 people. A restaurant within the museum, Please Taste Café, can handle 100 people seated.

FSE: What led you into the restaurant business to start with?

GUTIN: My family was in the business, so I was involved with restaurants at an early age.

FSE: How did you decide to branch into catering?

GUTIN: Libre Management was already offering catering through Cuba Libre Restaurant & Rum Bar restaurants in Philadelphia and Atlantic City, and nightlife concepts such as 32° Luxe Lounge. My partner Larry Cohen was a minority owner of Max & Me Catering, when the company became an exclusive caterer for Philadelphia's National Constitution Center. Two years ago the city's tourism and convention business began to take off and we saw huge growth and sales potential in the catering and foodservice industry. It was then that we decided to take full ownership of Max & Me Catering. We've already seen rapid development, picking up more exclusive venues, such as the Independence Visitor Center, where we've just introduced an al fresco café. We're also excited to lead the culinary and catering operations at the new location of the Please Touch Museum.

FSE: You're clearly doing something right if your business is going to double next year! What is the "secret" of your success?

GUTIN: Not many caterers understand how to work day in and day out as a guest in a museum or other cultural building. We specialize in it. In each building, we have kitchens and offices manned by a resident culinary, sales and operational staff. We become partners with the building and earn their trust. That fact and our exceptional execution lead venues to seek us out.

FSE: What do you enjoy most about what you do?

GUTIN: I enjoy the challenges that continuous growth brings to the table each day. There's always something new to conquer, since our company is constantly growing.

FSE: What's the biggest challenge today and how are you coping with it?

GUTIN: Managing growth. Expansion changes the organizational dynamics in the internal business environment.

FSE: What's the hardest part of offering a fine dining experience for thousands?

GUTIN: Making it look easy and effortless!

FOODSERVICE EAST

The Business-to-Business Publication of the \$80 Billion Northeast Foodservice Industry



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