

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.



What is it about New Jersey that makes it a state that's spawned many well-known foodservice operators and chefs?

Ted Newcomer, Jr., vice president of operations and corporate beverage director of Chow Fun Food Group in Providence, RI grew up in the industry in Bradley Beach, working in kitchens and the front of the house.

He knew it was the industry for him, going on to Johnson & Wales where he earned an associates degree in culinary arts and a B.S. in food management.

He joined Chow Fun Food Group in 1998, working as cook, server and bartender at XO Steakhouse where he was promoted to assistant manager in 2001 and bar manager at 10 Prime Steak & Sushi a year later. In 2003, he was named corporate beverage manager.

This year, he's been overseeing some of the newer additions to the group – Rick's Roadhouse and more recently, Café Noir, the conversion of XO to a moderately priced French brasserie and bar.

FSE: What led you into the restaurant business? How did you start?

NEWCOMER: My mother was definitely the person who led me to the restaurant business. She spent most of my childhood as a professional server in a well known fine dining establishment in our town, and I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with her there, being exposed to the finer points of hospitality at a young age. By the time I was 15 I had done just about every job imaginable from bussing tables to washing dishes to running food.

After holding multiple culinary and food service positions on the Jersey Shore and in my home town of Bradley Beach, I came to Rhode Island to pursue a career in Culinary Arts at Johnson & Wales University. My first real step into the business was when John Elkhay offered me a job as a prep cook in 1998. I guess you could say it was baptism by fire.....if you know Elkhay, you know what I mean! I just celebrated my 10 year anniversary with John and Chow Fun Food Group, working my way up from prep cook to line cook, bartender to bar manager, beverage director to my current role of three years, Vice President/Corporate Beverage Director where I oversee beverage purchasing and FOH operations for all five of our restaurants.

FSE: What's the most challenging part of your job?

NEWCOMER: The most challenging part of my job is juggling the every day operations of five unique locations. Because all of our concepts are different and so unique each one requires its own special attention....its a lot of thinking on your feet and putting out fires!

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

NEWCOMER: I love the PEOPLE! Friends joke about me being the “Local Celebrity”I simply can't go anywhere without running into someone I know! Funny thing is that I'm from New Jersey so no one (including me) can figure it out! While I attribute most of it to being in the restaurant business, I must admit...I'll talk to anyone who will listen! Guess you can't work at the city's hottest spots without getting to know everyone in town!

FSE: What do you like least?

NEWCOMER: It's tough to become really good at something great when you are always doing something different every day. Because we are a small independently owned group, all the members of our executive team are asked to wear many hats. That's not to say I don't love what I do, it's just that going from Sheriff of Rick's Roadhouse one day to Suit & Tie Guy the next isn't always easy! Oh...and recently I've been the general contractor in charge of our newest concept renovation Café Noir! ... Good times!!!

FSE: Doing Rick's Roadhouse was somewhat of a change for Chow Fun Food Group – did you have to shift gears from a fine dining orientation to something funkier?

NEWCOMER: Yes and no. I am truly a down home Jersey boy at heart so part of me feels right at home at Rick's Roadhouse. It is the type of atmosphere that I would choose for my own personal business. Casual, comfortable, and a place where you can relax and be yourself around staff and guests alike. Additionally, I was instrumental in the design, décor, and build-out of Rick's, so my gears were already shifting before I arrived on the job!

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

NEWCOMER: Just being myself and not taking things too seriously. This can be a difficult business that takes up a lot of your time and energy if you let it. Fortunately, at the end of the day - no matter what happens - I still get to go home to my fiancée and three beautiful children.

FSE: What's your favorite food?

NEWCOMER: XO's Espresso Martini.Guess that's a drink!

FSE: How do you juggle family and work?

NEWCOMER: Fortunately, my fiancée is also in the restaurant business, so she is very understanding of the long and sometimes erratic hours. Additionally, my future mother-in-law lives with us and is extremely helpful with the children. Like me, the kids have been exposed to the restaurant business from early on and they are pretty inspired by what dad does for a living. My daughter Lily is especially interested in the business and can often be found playing “restaurant” and taking orders around the dinner table! Despite our long hours, my fiancée and I have weekly date nights and try to spend quality time together with the family whenever possible.

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