

# 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.



*A chef who began cooking at age 15 and later trained in numerous cities around the globe when he began his professional career, Thomas McAliney, today the corporate chef for Brandt Beef, brings a diverse background to that post. He owned and operated his own acclaim-winning restaurant in the Hudson Valley, McHurley's in East Fishkill, NY; served as executive chef for Planet Hollywood and Restaurant Associates; as executive chef and assistant g.m. of The Union Club in Manhattan; and executive chef and director of food and beverage with Greenwich (CT) Country Club.*

*Throughout his culinary career, the CIA graduate emphasized connections with local growers, seasonal products and environmentally sustainable foods.*

*At Brandt, a single family-owned producer of all natural beef products, he provides education and recipes to chefs, retailers and consumers and advocates for the use of the entire animal and raise awareness of the company's "farm to fork" philosophy which involves raising animals humanely and naturally without hormones or antibiotics.*

**FSE:** Where did you grow up and how did you decide to become a chef?

**CHEF MCALINEY:** I was raised in the Hudson Valley in New York. I decided to become a chef after spending weekends and summers working in restaurants and observing the passion, precision and dedication it takes to truly create fine cuisine.

**FSE:** What were the most important experiences you had in kitchens and who were your most influential mentors?

**CHEF MCALINEY:** Honestly, the most inspiring moments in my career have come not only from the kitchen, but from my experiences with farmers, ranchers and artisanal food producers as well. I would say that I have drawn on the technical skills I honed working with Jean Marie Ammat in Bordeaux and creativity from Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

**FSE:** How did you become interested in sustainable, local foods?

**CHEF MCALINEY:** Growing up in the Hudson Valley, we were fortunate to have great, local, seasonal produce. And when I eventually opened my own restaurant there, I was able to source directly from the local farmers and dairies. The difference in quality of these provisions reminded me of the ingredients chefs in France used on a daily basis. From there, it became a passion of mine to have my food be defined more by the quality of the ingredients than any other factor.

FSE: What led you from a commercial restaurant to your present position?

CHEF MCALINEY: Without a doubt, the chance to work with a single family owned cattle company that not only aspired to raise the best performing cattle available, but also to raise them naturally and sustainably. In my quest to bring the best beef eating experience to my guests, I tasted every product available to a chef, and when I tasted Brandt Beef, I knew immediately it was something special. You could taste the passion the family put into the product. It is a wonderful experience being in the forefront of this movement.

FSE: Do you see a trend within the industry, at least at the high end, toward paying more attention to where food comes from?

CHEF MCALINEY: Absolutely, but I don't see the movement being ingrained solely in high-end restaurants. In fact, what my mission has been for the last two years has not been limited to knowing where the animal comes from, but also includes working with chefs to utilize the entire animal in their restaurants. Mid-level and even casual restaurants can capitalize on this concept.

FSE: Are the recipes you develop geared for non-commercial as well as commercial foodservice use?

CHEF MCALINEY: Without a doubt. In fact, I sense the recipes are more used by amateur cooks. Chefs typically look at a recipe, draw some inspiration from it, and make one of their own from it.

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

CHEF MCALINEY: I believe that the secret to my success lies in being passionate about what I do and believing that you can learn something new each day.

FSE: When you go out to eat, what kinds of cuisine do you like?

CHEF MCALINEY: Lately, I tend to enjoy ethnic foods more than classic restaurants. I think today's younger chefs really understand the need for quality sourced products and many are cooking with local, seasonal, sustainable products, and I enjoy supporting them.

FSE: What's the greatest compliment you ever received as a chef?

CHEF MCALINEY: My wife Annie told me that she married me because of how well I cook. Actually, I once did a dinner while I was executive chef at The Union Club in New York for the Relais & Chateaux Society, and Patrick O'Connell and Daniel Boulud both praised my lamb Wellington dish.

FSE: What's in your refrigerator at home?

CHEF MCALINEY: Local cheeses, champagne, fresh local fish, farmers' market vegetables, and of course some Brandt Beef.

## FOODSERVICE EAST

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



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