

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.



Like many chefs, William Foley developed an interest in cooking while in high school. His parents both worked, and he'd return from school, his paper route and martial arts practice to prepare the evening meal for his family.

He quickly developed a love of various styles of food and knew he would move forward with cooking as a career path.

Today, Foley, a member of International Chaine De Rotisseurs, is executive chef at the Marriott Hartford Downtown in Hartford, CT where he creates menus and oversees daily culinary operations at Vivo, an award-winning upscale, seasonal trattoria focusing on Mediterranean flavors and fresh, local ingredients.

"With each seasonal harvest," says a box on the menu, "comes the ability to handcraft dishes that celebrate nature. Northern California's wine country has developed this organic tapestry into a lifestyle. At Vivo, we share this refreshing and robust approach in our kitchen and dining room. Life, love and enjoy the very best from us to you."

FSE: How did you become a chef?

FOLEY: I gave my career the same approach every day – work hard, be noticed and excel, and moved very quickly through the ranks. I began at the Marriott Springfield (MA) while attending college and went on to the Federal Hill Club in Agawam, MA. I became an executive chef at age 24 and worked in hotels, including 14 years at the Sheraton Bradley Airport, and have now returned full circle to Marriott where it all began.

FSE: What would you say is the "secret" of your success?

FOLEY: The first thing that comes to mind is hard work. My parents influenced me at a young age that there are many opportunities out there for anyone, and successful people are those who pursue them. I have always followed that path and strived to work hard, to be organized, and do my very best.

It is advantageous for people in this business to work all aspects of the field. It is much more rewarding to work hard, be organized and do my very best. It is much more rewarding to work with and manage associates whose positions you've, at one point, held and understand.

FSE: What kind of food are you serving at VIVO and to whom?

FOLEY: The demographic is widespread. The hotel generally operates as a corporate guest hotel Sunday through Thursday and a social hotel on the weekend. The customer base is anywhere from the hip and trendy and local movers and shakers to corporate groups and conventions. We enjoy a wealth of business professionals from downtown office buildings and also from our in-house or registered guest base. We can have as many as 1,200 guests in the hotel when busy, and another 5,000 from the Convention Center on any given day. Our demographics can change dramatically with the profile of each convention, meeting or show.

We have 160 seats so we can really produce some large meal periods. Our signature dishes include beef tenderloin tournedos in an au poivre sauce with a crispy polenta cake, green asparagus and micro white asparagus and seared sea bass over braised fennel infused with white wine, saffron, tomato and basil. Our prices range from \$4 to \$16 for appetizers and pizzas and \$15 to \$30 for entrees, and our average check with beverage is between \$35 and \$50.

FSE: What is the biggest challenge?

FOLEY: I have always tried to spend an equal amount of time in all aspects of the operation. I enjoy the business from the loading dock to the plate served. There are challenges at times to divide your time into different areas. What I enjoy about this business is that it is never the same. Business levels change daily and so do guests, and this is where the versatility becomes the key to success and facing daily challenges.

FOODSERVICE EAST

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



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