

Team Builder

ACF's 2008 Chef Professionalism Award winner takes team building to new heights.

By Kay Orde

Charles Carroll, CEC, AAC, executive chef at River Oaks Country Club in Houston, is so passionate about building teams that he's built his whole kitchen around what he calls the "Green Beret Sous-Chef Program." It's an apprenticeship program that, in addition to creating incentive programs and aiding in certification, focuses on inspiring, motivating, mentoring and developing young chefs to take their first executive-chef positions.

Carroll, 44, a member of ACF Professional Chefs Association of Houston, is the 2008 ACF Chef Professionalism Award winner. The award is sponsored by Nestlé Professional, Glendale, Calif.

"I enjoy our program at River Oaks Country Club that

Charles Carroll, 2008 ACF Chef Professionalism Award winner, is in the business of training young culinarians to be professionals.

mentors culinarians into their first jobs," Carroll says. "I love this more than anything. To make a difference in someone's life is pretty special. To help young culinarians reach their goals and grow into positions of influence and leadership is pretty special. That's what I love to do."

Time to be great

Team building is so important to Carroll that he wrote *Leadership Lessons from a Chef: Finding Time To Be Great* (Wiley, 2007), a unique guide to leadership in the culinary arena. The book has brought him into contact with the very audience that he seeks to inspire: young culinarians.

"What gives me hope is that when I have a chance to speak to new culinarians, they get excited and understand my philosophy on success," he says. "They are hungry to learn."

His book grew out of a liking for Fortune 500-style books that gave him ideas on how to fit corporate life into the kitchen. He was also looking for a way to help those young people new to the profession.

"Over the past eight years or so, I have been experiencing a change in the younger

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Charles Carroll, center, is congratulated on his award by Bryan Frick, left, CEC, AAC, corporate executive chef, Nestlé Professional, and Greg Ische, manager of culinary innovation, Nestlé Professional.



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generation. The methods I once used with them were no longer working as well," Carroll says. "Making a difference to the success of the younger generation seemed to be getting harder and harder. So, I decided to write about how to find the time to be great, because that is really what it comes down to in this field—simply finding the time."

Competing is teamwork

Teams are a huge part of Carroll's professional life. In 1988, he was a member of the ACF New England Culinary Olympic Team that was named Regional World Champions in Frankfurt, Germany, earning team members two gold medals. He continued his involvement with ACF Culinary Team USA, serving six other U.S. culinary teams. In 2007, he was named to his seventh team, this time as coach to ACF Culinary National Team USA and ACF Culinary Regional Team USA.

"Culinary competitions are a ton of work," Carroll says. "They are so demanding, but if you put your heart into it, like anything else, you will get it all back tenfold. I have gained so many friends, so many ideas, so many contacts and so much knowledge through culinary competition. And the adrenalin of standing onstage representing the United States of America is pretty special. I have the ACF to thank for all of that.

"You have to learn quickly how to survive as a team, how to learn as a team and how to grow as a team. If you can't do this, your team will not survive. Being on seven U.S. teams has taught me the ultimate in team building."

Professionalism lessons

Carroll grew up in the foodservice business. His parents owned and operated the Rabbit Hill Inn in Lower Waterford, Vt. "So, as a child, I grew up doing chores and working hard," he says. "I started cooking when I was in second grade, and could set up the breakfast station by third grade."

In 1983, he graduated from the culinary-arts program at St. Johnsbury Academy, St. Johnsbury, Vt., and two years later, graduated from The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, N.Y. He has served as executive chef at The Balsams Grand Resort Hotel in Dixville Notch, N.H., and at Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, N.Y. He has been at River Oaks Country Club since May 2000.

Carroll's lessons in professionalism started early, instilled in him at a young age by his parents. "Never be afraid of what you know, and never be afraid of what you don't know," he says. "You don't have to be an executive chef to look and act like one. From day one,

the uniform has been a way of life and how I work. Always look and act like a professional.

"I think we probably teach professionalism, self respect and the respect of others before we start teaching how to cook."

Looking forward

Carroll is upbeat about the state of the culinary profession, and about the young people who will carry it on. He has a word of caution, however. "My concern is how fast the new generation expects or wants everything," he says. "They are so smart and quick with today's technology that sometimes they expect to be successful just as quickly. But one thing is for sure: You cannot substitute for experience. You have to invest in your future."

Family Matters

Charles Carroll and his wife Torill have two daughters, Kelsey, 16, and Randi, 14. When it's time for a little rest and relaxation, the family heads to the lake to enjoy the outdoors together. And when he has time away from his busy kitchen, Carroll can be found pursuing another interest: riding motorcycles.