

Dear ACF South Bend Chapter,

My name is Shaun Kuriata and I am a 2004 graduate of your great apprenticeship program. Immediately following my graduation I became the Sous Chef at the Lost Dunes Golf Club in Bridgman, Michigan. I would like to express my gratitude to the apprentices and board members of the South Bend ACF. The knowledge and experience that I gained as an apprentice is immeasurable, and my accolade is long overdue. This correspondence is intended as more of a hello than a goodbye. It has been nearly three years since I last attended an ACF meeting—a regrettable admission, to say the least. Thus, please recognize this also as an apology, not only to you as a chapter but also to myself as an active member, for not participating in the processes that governed this great curriculum. In all honesty, I suppose my lack of participation after graduation was the result of a combination of things; attendance at these meetings was no longer mandatory, and I was hired as a Sous Chef without getting to demonstrate proof of my accomplishments and I guess I was ashamed to come.

But that was then and this is now. Today I look back with remorse, wishing that I had been there for the chapter that paved the way for my continued success. I worked at Lost Dunes Club for three years and learned many things, but I always hoped that I would someday have a job that relied more on my formal training and less on the sheer need for bodies. That dream came true for me, which is why I feel compelled to give thanks to the people who helped me get to where I am today—people who I now hold in the highest regard.

I was recently hired at The Moorings Club in Vero Beach, Florida, an achievement that resulted solely from having a top-notch résumé, one rich in valuable experiences and colored by the indispensable lessons that were made possible by the apprenticeship program. I posted my resume on the ACF website in the Career Center section, and no more than two days later I received a call from Michael Lander, Executive Chef of the Moorings Club; Chef Michael invited me to Florida for an interview. Additionally, I received a call later that same day from the Executive Chef of a Casino Steakhouse in North Carolina; likewise impressed by the résumé that he accessed through the ACF website, he, too, offered an interview. Currently I have added the title of Saucier to my résumé, and am training to take over the Sous Chef position at this private Country Club on the Intracoastal Seaway, a gem that is tucked away in a quiet South Florida town, a Club catering to 750 members. Not only is the pay incomparable and the benefits better yet, but the perks also extend to include near-perfect weather and friendly, supportive colleagues.

To thank all the people to help me get here would be a short novel, so I will try to keep this brief. I would first like to thank Chef Denis Ellis for all the knowledge and stories he shared with us. Every culinary process or product that Chef Ellis spoke about included the most in depth facts and a personal story, bringing new light to things that would otherwise be considered miniscule. His years of experience and love of food were reflected in his students, each one of whom he encouraged to become something great in a field so diverse. His many awards have proven that he is truly the fiber that holds together not only the South Bend Chapter, but also the ACF on a national level. Again I would like to thank Chef Ellis, for being such an inspirational supervising chef and for seeing me through to graduation. His words and wisdom will be with me always, and I can only hope that one day I possess even a teaspoon of his kitchen wisdom.

Secondly my mentor, Chef Kippard Peters, who began with the lesson that being a smart-aleck does not substitute for being smart. I spent three long and transitional years under Kip's counsel, where we were challenged by not only the everyday culinary issues but also the move into a new clubhouse and the adaptation to new management. Amazingly, we managed to still pull it together every night. Kip revealed the art of pairing flavors, emphasizing the importance of food in its most simple form. I learned basic Italian cooking from Kippard and have since added experience to great knowledge. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a current logbook, taking the time to review my entries weekly and then discuss the featured techniques and ingredients. Towards the end of the program Kip gave me more responsibility and added duties, even allowing me free range to create my own dishes. His faith in me at such an early stage in my career made me who I am today, a character trait that I could have never have learned from a book. My experience with Kip in the private club setting has opened doors to more and better opportunities, all thanks to the foundation that Kip helped me build. Good luck, Kip, to all your success in the future and keep knocking 'em out doggy.

To the talented Morris Park Country Club kitchen staff, but especially Chef Ken Acosta, who showed me how to focus as well as how to laugh in the kitchen. To him I also attribute my knowledge of classic French stocks and sauces, techniques and ideas that I use everyday in my current position. But most of all I am grateful to Chef Ken for showing concern for my personal life; when I expressed doubts about, it was he who provided the encouragement I needed to push on. Although at times I didn't think I could make it, he believed in me and pushed me to finish what I started. Finally, I would like to thank Chef Ken for allowing us to practice for our practical during downtime in the Morris Park kitchen; without a few practice rounds, I'm not sure that I could have passed. My sincerest best wishes to Ken, may he always teach with a sense of humor.

Next, to Chef Don Miller, for instilling some fear in me and making me think twice about my attitude and the direction I was heading. Although I regretfully did not join the culinary team, I did have the opportunity to work with Chef Miller at our December meetings as well as a couple of Culinary Crusaders shops. Understanding and maintaining the fundamentals and professionalism of the chef jacket are just a few of the many lessons that I attribute to him. I'll never forget that on the day of my practical exam I was making a hollandaise when Chef Miller approached me, notes in hand, and asked, "Who taught you how to make hollandaise?" I responded, "Well, you taught me chef," which he did two years prior during a Culinary Crusaders demo with host Chef Miller. He simply smiled at me and said, "Good"; needless to say, my hollandaise was, and still is, awesome. Chef Miller is one of the greats, picking up where Chef Ellis left off with the apprenticeship. With him in charge, students will always graduate with a heightened standard of excellence and dedication. I hope that Chef Miller will continue teaching the basic techniques of classic cooking to the newest generation of chefs, arming them also with the leadership and determination that it takes to live up to his standard.

My final, deeply heartfelt thank you is to a person who taught me indispensable life lessons during our time together in the kitchen—Sen Trang. I remember Sen with such fondness as the person who taught me to be humble and never forget where I come from; I hope that, wherever her kind soul is today, she is doing something she loves. Sen and I spent a lot of time together in the kitchen, during which she would tell me about her life, amazing me with the numerous struggles she endured to become the cheer-spreading

woman she is today. So rich in spirit and strength, I am blessed to have known and worked with Sen, and find myself wishing at times that she could see me today—I know she would be proud

In closing, I would like to tell all the future apprentices to stay strong and seek the help of others. I know there were times when I wanted to quit but a good friend just wouldn't let me. Ask questions and practice hard. Enjoy your time learning and growing at school and on the job. Absorb the techniques you are taught, accept constructive criticism, and learn how to take compliments. I would also like to emphasize how important it is to join every food-oriented event and study group that is offered; I didn't, and in retrospect I know that it could have only advanced my training that much more. Be prepared to work and work hard when you graduate, because now you have a piece of paper that says you have become a certified culinarian, and your employer expects you to prove it. Long hours and tired feet are all part of it—though I'm sure most of you know that by now. Show up on time - right Chef Michaels? - and learn, learn, learn. Continue to support this great chapter and make your own path. Thank you all for such a great opportunity and the places it has since taken me to. Take care and God Bless. Enjoy the trip.