



Jason Baehr / Wesley Woods

I'm the Executive Chef at Wesley Woods. I grew up with music and actually went to college for architecture with a minor in music, but it was stressful. I started as a doughboy at East Chicago Pizza. My stepdad traveled all over for work and opened my eyes to food, and my stepmom's from Italy, so I gained a lot of hands-on cooking experience. I really enjoyed entertaining and creating these experiences, and that made me realize I needed to become a chef.

I studied hospitality and food service management, and I was in a dietary program for fitness, which allowed me to learn about health, wellness, and supporting nutritional needs. My friend opened a restaurant in college and asked me to be his chef. It was a great start to my career before I moved back to the Cleveland area and worked as a scratch cook at a local tavern. I joined the culinary program at Napa Valley and got my Accelerated Culinary Arts certificate. I then worked at the Ritz-Carlton for a few years, came back to Ohio, and started my own restaurant, Firefly American Bistro, until Covid shut it down. My neighbor is a dietary director in charge of the food department for a hospital and asked me to be a cook for him. I didn't think I'd ever cook again, but I love making a difference and changing the quality of the food for residents. I view LEC as the resort of senior living, and I love being part of elevating the standard. We create higher-quality food, and I'm able to bring an energy that ensures we're not just cafeteria food.

Wesley Woods provides room for growth, and I truly believe that as a whole, LEC actually practices their core values. They want to watch their employees grow, and I have plenty of backing and resources to equip me to reach another level. It's refreshing to work in a senior living community, especially one that's not-for-profit. You don't feel the bottom line you get in other places that may be very restricting of experiences and quality for customers. You don't have to worry about that here and can base decisions on what's good for our residents.



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I did the Taste of New Albany twice with my restaurant in the past. It's a fundraiser for the city and celebrates local food and culinary experience in New Albany by bringing everyone together to enjoy food, music, and the community. People vote on the presentation of table settings, and residents showcase what Wesley Woods is about and how we're a fun and comfortable place to be at their stage of life. This year I'm going off of resident favorites to show we do specialty events and aren't just cookie-cutter, we elevate the food. I'll be making dishes that are sweet, savory, spicy, crunchy, and colorful. It's attractive and makes you want to eat it just from the smell and plating. It draws you in, and that's what food should do. I like to get people interested in a food they wouldn't normally eat, and it's a fun challenge for me. Being a part of the community by participating in things like the Taste of New Albany shows that we're here.

A quality dining experience looks like cleanliness, prompt service, being greeted professionally and politely without overbearance, and that feeling of being at a family dinner. People love coming here because they're relaxed and enjoying each other's company and feel like they're eating at your house. It improves quality of life. If we do our part, it makes people come together more often from different areas of living in Wesley Woods. I love how our menus generate buzz and encourage residents to bring their families and show them off and make connections.