



CULINARY EXPERT Q & A

Director of Dining Services

Ruben Molina / *Life Enriching Communities*



How long have you been in the industry?

Twenty-six years if you include the time spent in family-owned restaurants.

What or who inspired you to become a chef?

Culinary Arts and Hospitality is a way of life. My inspiration comes from the joy of serving those on our team and within our communities. To see the growth translate from theory to practice & plate to palate.....I get goose bumps seeing what our teams are capable of!

If you could learn under any renowned chef, who would it be?

When I think of renowned chefs so many come to mind. Honestly, I try to observe not only chefs but all levels in the culinary community. The moment we start to believe we know it all is the moment we miss something spectacular. Don't get me wrong, the ways of the classic chef are still engrained in every fiber of my being, I just take a different approach in today's world.

Can you share a memorable experience from your culinary journey?

Wow! So many to choose from. It seems like there's something new every day! I'd say the most memorable experience was interviewing for a private chef role with a well know Reds player. After the initial discussion about my history, I was asked to prepare a meal utilizing the ingredients purchased by the client that day. Talk about a full mystery basket of ingredients! Ultimately, I landed the role!

What are some essential skills every chef should have?

There are many skills a chef should acquire over the years: knife skills, sanitation, recipe development, menu planning, etc. The one that always stood out to me the most is the ability to bring a team together. A chef can only get so far alone, like most teams, but through collaboration, accountability, adaptability and good direction a chef will lead the way to success! Leadership, that's the most essential skill.

How do you stay up to date with current trends?

Between social media, food shows, culinary expos, peer discussions, continuing education, books, restaurant experiences. The list goes on and on. My favorite is trying new restaurants.

How do you balance creativity with the practicality of running a kitchen?

Processes. Kitchens mature over time and require an extreme amount of energy to keep them running. The more you define the process, the greater availability you will have to create new!

For us home cooks, what's a useful tip or trick that you can share?

Take the time to make it an event. Food should bring people together, so bake those cookies with your kids, invite friends for a grill out, and talk to each other at the dinner table. P.S. If you cook, they clean!

What's your favorite local restaurant?

In Cincinnati, Abigail Street, Clybornes in Mason and Bite in Milford. As for the Columbus area, Joya's in Worthington, The Top Steakhouse and Kitchen Social. I'm still exploring Cleveland but have enjoyed Thyme X Table in Bay Village.