

Aurora chef named one of Canada's Top 30 Under 30 by hospitality industry



By Brock Weir

The long-awaited spring officially arrives on Friday and for Aurora executive chef Andrew Evans, it is the time of year when the creative juices really start to flow.

As co-founder of Cookery Catering, the local company which tailors menus for events big and small, and has become a popular mainstay of the Aurora Farmers' Market, he is waiting for the warm weather to kick in to welcome fresh harvests of asparagus and fiddleheads.

While he has been waiting for the arrival of the fiddleheads, he has not been whiling away the winter twiddling his thumbs; Mr. Evans was named this month one of the Ontario Hospitality Institute's Top 30 Under 30 for 2014. The program recognizes young entrepreneurs and trail blazers who are seen as the "rising stars" of the hospitality industry.

"It is a big accomplishment," he says. "I was proud to be one of the ones selected" and even nominated "at the beginning of this process. I like the way this program acknowledges all sorts of different jobs within the hospitality industry, so it is not narrowed down to just chefs or restaurateurs.

"This is definitely good for our brand and our name."

Mr. Evans co-founded Cookery Catering with Mat Orr. They take their work seriously and this acknowledgement, he said, really helps to make a mark on their business.

On the road to becoming an executive chef, Mr. Evans says he had a "good upbringing of good food." His parents and grandparents were very kitchen savvy, and he grew up watching them, and particularly his grandmother, cook. He would pitch in and lend a hand cooking dinner and it was a time not only to learn on a hands-on basis, but also absorb stories of the family restaurant as they worked over the stove and countertop.

"I thought it would be nice to find a local restaurant to work in," says Evans. "From there, I just discovered my true love and passion for what I do. That turned into going to culinary school and I completed my program at Niagara College. From there, I did an apprenticeship at Magna Golf Club in Aurora and did some travel through Asia and Europe."

In practice, Evans says he defines his cooking style, and that of Cookery Catering, as "local and seasonal."

"I really love everything out of the garden," he says. "Being a chef, I think it is important to have a good involvement in knowing where your food comes from, how it is produced and being able to watch it grow," he says, noting that he takes part in a community

garden in Snowball where they are involved in the whole growth process, harvesting the finished product after the requisite weeks or months.

?It is nice to get out of the winter months and have something to look forward to during the spring and summer. Then, during the fall, you have all of the root vegetables you are able to produce. It's not only the garden, but it is also to support local farmers and other local businesses and use their products because there are a lot of fantastic products out there you can use from Niagara to way up in Northern Ontario. [You can also use] a lot of Canadian products like seafood, beef, or poultry. There are so many different aspects of food we have in our industry and we are so lucky to have it right at our fingertips in Canada.?

The approaching spring, he says, excites every chef because everyone is getting out of the cold, long winter, the ground warms up, and then the magic happens. After the asparagus and the fiddleheads make their way to the table, then there will be mushrooms, and in the late spring, the first of the berries.

?There is lots to look forward to,? he says. ?This is my passion and I love it every day. I wake up and there are always new heights to climb.?