

## Bryan Sullivan Inspires the Next Generation of Chefs at Pier 5 Hotel

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By: Erin Flaherty



For many chefs, having the opportunity to cook at the James Beard House is just a dream, but for Bryan Sullivan of the Pier 5 Hotel in Baltimore, MD, it was a dream come true.

“It’s something I’ve wanted to do for ten years,” Sullivan said. “It was amazing.”

In August of this year, Sullivan had the opportunity to present his “Celebrate the Chesapeake” menu to 75 guests at the distinguished New York culinary foundation. His focus was on regional specialties, such as crab and rockfish, along with locally produced cheeses and vegetables. After working on the menu for over a year, he felt it was perfect in February when he presented it to the James Beard Foundation. They agreed and scheduled the dinner for August.

In order to offset the costs of the trip for himself and his assistants, Sullivan held a fundraising dinner at the Pier 5 in July. According to Sullivan, he was much more nervous about the fundraiser than he was about the dinner at the James Beard House.

“It was so peaceful,” he said about cooking at the foundation’s legendary location. “I could do a dinner like that every day – that would be my ultimate job.”

Sullivan has held his current position at Pier 5 for just over a year after spending some time as the Executive Chef at Camden Yards, which was a much different operation.

“Pier 5 is a great location,” he said. “It allows me to do smaller, more boutique type functions. I can focus on each client and make it custom. At Camden Yards you don’t have the ability to touch each guest as closely.”

Working closely with the guests is one of the things Sullivan enjoys most about being a chef, which is why he prefers putting out banquets for 100-150, which is what he generally does at Pier 5.

“I enjoy being around the people,” he said. “I make them feel at home. People like when the chef comes around [after dinner].”

Aside from being able to work more closely with his guests at Pier 5, Sullivan has also had the chance to be more creative with his menus. When he started, he updated all of the menus with new, fresh items.

“When I do a tasting, I can make whatever I want depending on how creative I feel that day,” he said. “I’m trying to get away from the traditional buffet and do more stations.”

Not only is Sullivan moving away from traditional banquet set ups, but like many chefs he is moving towards more local and sustainable items, as he showcased in his James Beard House dinner. But moving towards more local fare has not necessarily been less expensive in the overall picture, as there are higher labor costs associated with fresh food, even with less expensive items such as produce.

“You can buy all beautiful vegetables to turn into something, but you have to pay somebody to do that,” he said.

Though Sullivan has been in the kitchen since his late teens, his official journey to become a chef began in 1996. He attended culinary school at Johnson & Wales, completing an internship in Ireland before moving to Washington, DC to work at the Grand Hyatt and later with Michel Richard at Citronelle, where his passion for food grew even greater, but he credits his culinary school mentor Soren Arnoldi, a certified master chef, with helping him develop as a chef.

“He helped me to ‘get it,’” he said. “I didn’t even know him for that long, [but] I get it now more than ever.”

Sullivan is now helping the next generation of chefs to ‘get it’. Pier 5 does not have a sous chef, but has a staff of culinary students and recent culinary school graduates who Sullivan works very closely with and expects to eventually promote one to a sous chef position.

“It took me a long time to get to that level,” he said. “They’re accelerating at a faster pace [by working directly with the executive chef]. Hopefully one day I’ll be their Soren Arnoldi.”

