

## Sourcing Product from the Right Vendors Gains Importance in the Kitchen: A Conversation with Frank Troiano

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With almost a dozen years behind him in his professional career, Frank Troiano says it was a love of food that started when he was a waiter and busboy that inspired him to pursue a career in the kitchen.

"At my first job, I started cooking and I saw what it was to work in the kitchen and I guess I caught the bug," he said. "I've been there ever since."

With a degree in Restaurant Management from Westchester Community College, Troiano has stayed close to home during his career, holding his current position as Banquet Chef at the Doubletree Tarrytown since October 2008. Before that, he worked at the Tarrytown House, as well as for catering company Abigail Kirsch, and a private country club in New Jersey.

"My background is in hotel catering and private clubs," he said. "I got a little taste of the a la carte world with the country club and I think that's a good skill to have, but I like the control and planning that banquets allow. I know what to expect."

And, with the largest ballroom in Westchester, the Doubletree sees all types of events, from weddings to corporate outings. But, Troiano doesn't let the planning and paperwork of such large events keep him from being in the kitchen.

"Monday and Tuesday are planning and ordering days so later in the week I can plan for the weekend," he said. "Later in the week I try to be hands on in the kitchen. My position is more of a working chef's position."

Fortunately for Troiano and his staff, the Doubletree is one of Westchester's more popular event destinations and he said they haven't felt much of a slowdown during his tenure.

"We've kept busy," he said. "We've been able to keep a full staff. When other places are cutting back, we're hiring and we're working."

Perhaps its their location on the Hudson River or their proximity to New York City that have helped keep them busy, but Troiano says they are also becoming known for service and quality.

"We've been able to get some good press," he said. "Our reputation is building about our quality and service."

With a strong reputation keeping them busy, Troiano said an important skill for him to have is knowing where to source product and how to choose the best vendors. This wasn't a skill that was always important to chefs who had unlimited budgets and staffs, but as operations have scaled back in the last few years, it is becoming more crucial.

"As kitchen staffs are getting smaller and we're being asked to do more with less, this is an important skill for chefs to have," Troiano said. "A lot more items are coming prepared for convenience, like washed and trimmed produce and homemade hors d'oeuvres."

Having prepared items help Troiano and his full-time staff of four put out the best events for their corporate and social guests. With a steady group of returning corporate business clients, Troiano makes sure he keeps them interested, while still keeping dishes easy to prepare.

"We have our core menu, but we have a lot of repeat business, especially in corporate so that's where we'll vary it up a bit," he said. "We still keep the basics, but we change up the garnish or a sauce. Something we're mindful of is giving the customer options and choices; for example on our buffets, we're doing more deconstructed salads."

Though he enjoys the stability of his core menu and everyone knowing how to prepare the dishes, occasionally he'll get a customer who's seen something on TV that they want to recreate or have a concept they want him to use for their event.

"We'll take their concepts and try to give them something unique," he said. "It's just enough variety to keep it interesting, but not overwhelming."

Troiano enjoys the challenge of having to think out of the box for unique events, and looks forward to expanding his culinary skills through his current position.

"In the future, I would definitely see myself in the kitchen gaining more experience and being able to handle bigger challenges," he said. "I would like to fine tune my culinary skills and my managerial skills and continue to advance as a chef."

