

Chef Spotlight
Julius Pontes
Nashawtuc Country Club

Julius Pontes Brings a World of Experience to the Table



With over thirty years of experience at properties around the world, Julius Pontes has seen his share of issues in the kitchen. But the biggest issue he's facing at his current position as Executive Chef of Nashawtuc Country Club is finding quality staff for the busy summer season.

"In America, the labor is a key factor," he said. "You don't have the quality of labor that you get in Europe."

In his experience, Pontes has found that in Europe, people view the food industry as more of a profession and aren't afraid to pay their dues to get to the top. In America, however, he's found that many more people just work in kitchens until a more stable opportunity comes along, or that culinary school graduates are hoping for the big paying job right after graduation.

Not only does having a solid staff benefit Pontes by making his hectic job a bit easier, but having consistency in the kitchen is key for the Concord, Mass. club's members as well.

"The members are very finicky," he said. "Everything has to be just right. I have to make sure the same person makes the same dish because the members notice the smallest difference."

After spending the majority of his career at hotels, Pontes came to Nashawtuc just about a year ago from the Beechwood Hotel in Worcester, which was a bit of an adjustment for him. He made the move to be closer to his family and ended up gaining a whole new "family" at the club which often requires him to be on the premises from early morning to late at night.

"It's more like a family atmosphere," he said of the private country club. "You tend to get to know [the customer] even though you don't socialize. At night you can't really leave because they want you to come to their tables."

Pontes has taken advantage of having such a captive and consistent audience by introducing some new menu options to the members.

"I've changed little things," he said. "People like to try different ethnic dishes. I've introduced Indian cuisine and they love it."

After starting out at hotel school in his native India, Pontes took the advice of his uncle that if he wanted to travel the world, he should get into the food business. He started out working as an opening cook for all of the Ramada International properties in the Middle East where a fellow chef convinced him he should move to Europe and get proper culinary training. After culinary school in Switzerland, he went on to hotels in Italy, Germany, France, England, Austria and Belgium before coming to America to work for the Marriott, who he was with for 13 years, then later spending time at Westin and Radisson properties.

As he trained in Europe, he developed a culinary style and work ethic very similar to that of German chefs, creating rich sauces and never knowing when to stop, though he counts world renowned French chef Alain Ducasse as a big influence in the kitchen.

"I worked for him for a week in Monte Carlo," he said. "He's one of the best I've ever worked with. His food is so simple but his ideas are amazing. He's just so talented."

Ducasse may have influenced his cooking style, but Pontes credits his wife with making him a better manager. He met her while they both worked for Marriott at the Burlington, MA location. He says meeting her was the second greatest accomplishment in his life, after coming to America.

“She always used to critique my management skills. Over the years she’s changed me,” he said. “When I first came here, my plan was to go to Canada, Alaska, Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand, then go back to India and open my own place. Then I met my wife and in twenty-two years, I’ve never left Massachusetts.”

As he looks toward the next step in his career, Pontes would like to help shape the next generation of great culinary minds. When the club is less busy after the summer season, he says he would like to spend some time as a substitute teacher at local technical high schools that offer culinary programs.

“My wife thinks I should because I’m good at teaching people – developing and motivating them,” he said.

