

Chef Spotlight  
Michael Panasuk  
Marriott Copley

### **Michael Panasuk Finds Balance Is the Key In and Out of the Kitchen**



While most chefs spend their careers jumping from one company to another, Marriott Copley executive chef Michael Panasuk has spent the majority of his 25-year career with Marriott, including two stops at the Copley Square location. He attributes the length of his tenure to the type of company the Marriott family runs.

“When you read [CEO Bill] Marriott’s blog, it’s like reading about your family,” Panasuk said. “It’s special for a company to have that kind of culture. A lot of our associates have been here for 20 or 30 years.”

Becoming a chef was almost inevitable for Panasuk – one set of his grandparents owned a restaurant and the other owned a bakery in the Boston area when he was growing up. When it came time to pick a college,

Panasuk chose Johnson & Wales, which he attended for four years earning both culinary and management degrees.

“I just migrated towards it because it was really the only thing I knew,” he said.

After finishing his culinary degree at Johnson & Wales, Panasuk was faced with a choice to either hone his culinary studies in Paris or stay in Rhode Island for two more years and earn his management degree. After a visit to Paris, Panasuk decided the best option would be to stay and balance out his education at Johnson & Wales. Two years later after finishing his management studies, he found himself faced with another decision – where to start his career.

“I decided to go with Marriott because they had a reputation of developing great managers,” he said. “I never thought I would be with the company this long.”

Panasuk started his Marriott career in Andover before his first stint at Copley, and then later moved to the properties in Cambridge and Newton, before returning to the Copley location four and a half years ago.

Panasuk admits his current job as executive chef, which he has held for the past two years, isn’t easy. With six outlets at Marriott Copley, he has a lot of different balls in the air. However, as he has climbed up the ladder within the Marriott organization, he has learned one very valuable lesson – the more talented your employees are, the easier your job is.

“The better the people you surround yourself with, the better the team is,” he said. “Talent can be represented in a lot of different ways. You try to offset the team with different types of talent. That makes it a lot less challenging.”

While Panasuk doesn't mind the administrative side of his job, he enjoys being able to balance it out with time in the kitchen, just cooking. His favorite outlet to do that at is Champions, the Marriott's sports bar.

“It's simple food,” he said. “It's a great team that's fun to cook with. It's where I go when I've done the administrative part of my job and I want to get away.”

Balance is also important to him outside the kitchen. When he's not working, he tries to make time for staying in shape by biking, running or skiing.

“It's an important part of your life to find balance, stay healthy and relieve stress,” he said. “I think for a lot of people in the industry it's hard, you don't have the time or energy to take care of yourself.”

With his years of experience, Panasuk has seen a lot of changes in the industry. One of the biggest things he has noticed is that the consumer is much more educated about food than they were 10 to 15 years ago. This forces chefs to be much more innovative with this cuisine.

“You've got to be more and more competitive because the consumer is more educated,” he said. “Reality shows educate the consumer more and their expectation is higher.”

Another challenge Panasuk thinks the industry is facing is the increased competition among the hotel chains in the major cities.

“There doesn't seem to be as much business in the city,” he said. “There are more mouths at the table, so to speak.”

With the increased competition for guests, hotels are faced with creating exciting new concepts to keep their visitors coming back. Within the next twelve months, Marriott Copley will be unveiling a new concept – a high energy restaurant that Panasuk calls “American cuisine with a twist”. Even the atmosphere will be kicked up a notch, with flat screen TVs and video art.

“It's going to be one concept during the day and a sports-type bar at nighttime,” he said. “It's going to be electric.”

Panasuk's goal for the upcoming year is to focus on guest satisfaction. He knows that with the team he has in place, this should be an easy goal to attain.

“We have a team that is one of the best I’ve ever worked with,” he said. “I’m really proud of them. They’ve accomplished great things.”