

Chef Spotlight  
Peter Dwyer  
Hilton Hartford

### **Competition and Travel Motivate Peter Dwyer in the Kitchen**



Hilton's motto is that travel more than just A to B. Peter Dwyer, executive chef at the Hilton Hartford, has certainly proved that over the course of his career.

Dwyer, who recently celebrated his one year anniversary with the hotel, has traveled the world for business and for pleasure in the last fifteen years. Recent competitions have him traveling the country earning top American Culinary Federation (ACF) honors and learning techniques that he has brought into the Hilton's restaurant, M&M Coffee Shop.

"We try and apply the principals we learn at ACF competitions, like how to build plates," Dwyer said. "Everything that goes on the plate has a purpose."

In January, Dwyer earned his first gold medal at the 2008 Myrtle Beach ACF Southeastern Chef's Competition. His seared skirt steak earned him the gold in the hot foods mystery box competition. In February, he fell just short of his goal at the SS Kemp Culinary Classic and earned a bronze in the F-1 Hot Foods Mystery Basket category. He is looking forward to the ACF National Competition in Las Vegas this July.

Aside from plating with a purpose, Dwyer has learned how to control the amount of food his guests consume from his recent competitions, which usually consist of putting together three or four course meals.

"I think the lesson to be learned from competitions is portion size," he said. "If you're going to be serving multiple courses, you need to take into account what people can digest. You don't want to have your guest stuffed; you want them to feel full."

He points to three-course menus at chain restaurants such as TGI Friday's as an indication that this trend is coming into the mainstream.

"You're seeing a more nutritionally balanced menu plan without sacrificing flavors and richness," Dwyer said.

Along with learning new techniques through competition, Dwyer, who was promoted to Executive Chef in December, has been taking advantage of the opportunity to see the country one culinary competition at a time. In the past six months, he has traveled to Oklahoma, New York, Minnesota, South Carolina and Ohio.

“For me these culinary trips are fun because you have to find all your ingredients [in a strange city],” he said. “It’s solving the whole puzzle.”

Travel is not just something Dwyer does for work, however. He also enjoys traveling in his spare time. Before coming to the Hilton, he spent four months in five countries in Southeast Asia and would love to travel to Iceland.

“My experience in different cultures is what inspires me,” he said.

Prior to joining the staff at the Hilton as the banquet chef last year, the Connecticut native worked at establishments across the country, including Sky City, the restaurant at the top of the Space Needle in Seattle, where he was the sous chef for four years, before returning to the East Coast and eventually taking a private chef job at a fraternity at Trinity College.

“I got back to the roots of cooking and making things from scratch,” he said about the position at Trinity. “I wanted to build relationships with the guys. It was nice to put a face to the customer.”

Though he no longer has such a direct relationship with his customers, their satisfaction is still his main goal.

“I don’t want to have a guest go away unhappy,” he said. “You understand as a chef that you’re not going to make everyone happy, but you learn to fix things for the future.”

Dwyer understands that in the current economy if he sends a customer away less than fully satisfied, he’ll have to fight twice as hard to win that customer back.

“We’re in the luxury business,” he said. “You can’t have that many mistakes. You can’t lose business because you have a harder time getting it back.”

