

## Ted Hughes Keeps Things Simple at the Washington Golf Club

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By: Erin Flaherty



Though he has worked in kitchens all over the world, including the Middle East, Washington Golf Club Executive Chef Ted Hughes considers staffing the biggest challenge faced across the industry.

“Finding good qualified help [is a challenge],” he said. “Even just finding help that you can teach. This generation [of culinary students] thinks they are just going to move up the ladder without having to do anything. There is a huge misconception about what actually happens in the kitchen.”

Luckily for Hughes, a clubhouse renovation five years ago forced him to pare down his staff and allowed him to re-train the staff that he kept along with the new staff members when the clubhouse was fully up and running again.

“I changed the way they did everything,” he said. “It was an awesome opportunity to be able to do that here.”

Though Hughes wants his staff to be the best, he also says they are a bit like a family in the kitchen.

“I try to keep it like kind of a family atmosphere,” he said. “And I’m the head of the family.”

There is no doubt that Hughes has the experience to be the head of the family. Though he didn’t consider a culinary career until college, he has enjoyed being in the kitchen from a young age. After starting out as a chemistry major at the Rochester Institute of Technology, a part-time job as a busboy inspired him to try a different path. He took a year off and worked in a French restaurant, then completed his degree in Food and Hospitality Management. After spending a few years in the industry working in various restaurants, he moved to France to study at Le Cordon Bleu to learn classical French cooking styles.

After returning from France, he took a position at the Silverado Resort in Napa Valley where he was Executive Sous Chef for four years. The resort’s Executive Chef encouraged him to travel and Hughes took his advice and took a position as the Executive Chef for King Hussein and the Royal Family of Jordan for two years. Not only did Hughes benefit from the opportunity, but his family got to enjoy the time abroad as well.

“That was one of the best moves we ever had,” he said. “I had zero experience in Middle Eastern cuisine so I studied a lot while I was there. I had a lot of training in Pacific Rim cuisine and European cuisine so it really tied everything together.”

His time in the Middle East was not just an opportunity for him to study world cuisine. He also had to work through many unique situations and in many unique locations, including the desert.

“We were doing a meal in the middle of Wadi Rum,” he said. “We built a huge bread oven and made a traditional bedouin style meal. That was a really cool, cool event.”

Events like that and cooking for various dignitaries have helped Hughes bring a less traditional feel to the Washington Golf Club. With its younger than average members and its proximity to great restaurants in Washington, DC, it’s important for Hughes to keep his menus fresh and exciting. Though he has some staple items, he changes his restaurant menus every two months and his banquet menus yearly.

“People are definitely much more educated about what they eat and drink,” he said. “If you’re menu says you’re serving Cooper River Salmon, it better be from the Copper River.”

When it comes to menus for the many different outlets in the 72,000 square foot club house, Hughes likes to keep things fresh and simple, using a lot of locally produced items, but giving them a worldly flavor, staying away from anything too trendy.

“I like my food pretty natural,” he said. “I like to play around with fusing different cuisines. The trend should be about quality of food and the quality of the preparation and presentation.”

Hughes, like many country club chef, has the advantage to knowing the members who eat his food, which allows him to use their influence in creating his menus.

“I walk the dining rooms and talk to the people and find out what they want,” he said.

No matter what the people want, Hughes sticks to a simple preparation style, much like that of Mario Batali, who is one of the many chefs that he admires.

“There are a lot of talented chefs out there,” he said. “I think we should all just respect each other and try to get along.”

