

## Creating Greener Conventions, One Custom Menu at a Time: A Conversation with Tony Dedek

By: Erin Flaherty  
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Tony Dedek can blame peer pressure for his twenty-five year career in the food industry and his recent move to the Executive Chef position at the J. B. Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center.

"I grew up in Ohio and I wanted to hang out with my friends who were taking a culinary voc-tech course and it's been nonstop ever since," he said.

In his new position for just over a month, Dedek is no stranger to producing food for large scale events. After receiving a culinary degree at Johnson & Wales, his early years in the industry were spent in hotels, but he has most recently worked at the Fleet Center, Fenway Park and the

Boston Convention & Exhibition Center (B.C.E.C.).

"I was intrigued with sports and food aspect of it when I first started at the Fleet Center – how everything had gone a little more upscale," he said.

Creating food for such large properties has always been exciting to Dedek. Even though the Hynes doesn't host as many large conventions as its sister property, the B.C.E.C., the events are still much larger than the standard hotel or restaurant events.

"It's amazing to see how you can take a recipe for five people and turn around and make it for 5,000 and still keep the quality," he said. "There's a lot of planning involved, but after a while you have a system and it's 90 percent accurate."

ARAMARK runs the kitchens at both the Hynes and the B.C.E.C. and Dedek spent two years at the B.C.E.C. before moving to the smaller convention center last month. In his first Executive Chef position, Dedek faces more administrative responsibilities than he used to have.

"I'm not on the floor as much as I used to be," he said. "After being so used to the presentation of the food, now I'm more involved with the development of menus. It's tricky, but that's where you develop a good staff. It's the same amount of responsibility, just at a different level."

These days, because clients are looking to save money wherever they can, Dedek finds himself creating a lot of custom menus.

"The shows are downsizing and they are trying to spend their money to get the most bang for their buck," he said. "It's a challenge, but it's a challenge you like because you're able to drive the client into something you know will work and it gives the client a sense of creating their menus."

Creating a solid menu is a top priority for Dedek in his first year at the Hynes. For him, it is important to incorporate a lot of local products to create a more sustainable operation at the convention center. In his opinion, organic and sustainable products are not just a trend, but something that is going to be a long-term change in the industry.

"People are more conscious of food than they used to be," he said. "They are very aware of what they eat and where it comes from. Economically, it helps everyone."

Though there are obvious benefits to working with local products, it is not without its challenges, according to Dedek.

"It becomes a challenge for us to work with what's in season and what's available," he said. "Here you have to make sure you have what you're offering on the menu. You have to work closely with your purveyors and your sales staff."

Aside from creating a solid and sustainable menu, Dedek wants to focus on continuing to develop the culinary team that is in place at the Hynes. Many of his 60 staff members have been at the property for quite some time.

"I like to be close with the staff," he said.

Being close with his staff will help him to continue to achieve a balance between family and work, which he considers one of his greatest accomplishments.

"I think all that revolves around having a solid team and making sure you have the right people in the right spots," he said. "One of my stronger points is developing and training people."

