

Final Reflection on My 2018 Summer Mentorship-Model Internship in Culinary Arts at Tom's Place

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For seven weeks this summer, I interned under Executive Chef Lasse Sorensen at Tom's Place, a five-star restaurant in DeSoto, Illinois. I worked four days a week, Wednesday through Saturday, from 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Each day, I learned something new and am looking forward to learning more as I have the good fortune to continue my education at Tom's Place as an employee.

A Day in the Kitchen

Every day, I arrived at 2:00 p.m. and started by making fresh, homemade bread that would be served to customers when they first sat down. Once that task was completed, I moved to the station where I spent most of my time: the salad and dessert station. At the salad portion of the station, I prepared salads, made salad dressing, and gathered and cut fresh produce and herbs. Friday nights were "Wine Bar Nights," and they were one of my favorite nights because we always featured a new salad. During these Friday nights, I learned about different food combinations, such as watermelon and blue cheese with bacon or melon with prosciutto.

The desserts, however, were my favorite assignment because I could be creative and try different flavors and designs. I learned how to make creme brulee, bread pudding, Kahlua pie, and strawberry Romanoff.

Once we opened and customers arrived to dine, there was rarely time for breaks. Being very busy had its perks, but it was also very stressful at times. A perk of always being busy was that I learned how to prioritize my orders in a way that was most productive and best fit the work flow. It took me around a week to get into the rhythm of the bustling kitchen, but, once I did, it was a breeze. There were times when I felt overwhelmed by all the orders coming in, and that is when I actually learned the most about efficiency. For example, if there were three orders for the same salad orders on different tickets, I would make them all at the same time.

New Friends and a Sense of Family

At first, I was slightly nervous about working in a kitchen with adults all over the age of 25, but, to my surprise, it was no problem. By the end of my first week, it felt like we were all family. The staff and I all formed great relationships, and that is something that I would not trade for anything. We all work together well—having laughs and supporting each other. One of my favorite experiences in the kitchen was when all the cooks and I made a pastry dessert. We spent time trying different techniques and tossing around ideas on how to incorporate them into desserts. That experience reminded me of what it is like to cook at home with my family—complete with all the love, care, and genuine passion for cooking.

Takeaways

Throughout the internship, I learned cooking techniques, recipes, interesting facts about the restaurant business, the background/history of recipes, and life lessons. Based on the seven weeks that I spent in my internship, I realize that cooking and being part of the restaurant business is a career path that I am interested in pursuing. And, as I have been offered a job at Tom's Place, I will be able to continue my training under a world-renowned chef. I cannot wait to see what the future has in store for me as part of the restaurant business. There is no way to explain my gratitude to the Garwin Family Foundation for giving me this opportunity that I otherwise would have never gotten.