



# *The History of ACF Certification*

**THE FOODSERVICE/HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IS HIGHLY DIVERSE,** comprising many segments and offering a variety of career paths few other industries can match. Restaurants, hotels, clubs, private clubs, catering, corporations, and cruise ships offer just some of the numerous professional opportunities in this far-reaching field. Yet regardless of the type of foodservice/hospitality operation in which a culinarian works, the basic tenets of quality foodservice and hospitality remain the same: to prepare nutritious and delicious food, to handle food safely, and to ensure consistently high-level service. These are common goals shared by cooks and chefs in all facets of foodservice.

The American Culinary Federation (ACF) promotes quality foodservice for all segments of the industry, whether in a deli-café, an independent restaurant, or a five-star resort. Wherever people eat and however much they pay for their meal, the ACF maintains that all food should be presented appropriately and in an appealing manner, to stimulate the customer's appetite and then satisfy that hunger.

Such high-quality foodservice can be accomplished only by professionals who strive for perfection, to prepare and serve the best foods possible in every circumstance. Anyone can cook, but few have the passion for food that leads them to gain the expertise of a trained culinarian, someone who can transform the simplest ingredients into the most delectable dishes. In short, quality foodservice can be achieved only when someone has the requisite knowledge, skills, and passion.

To that end, the ACF, founded in New York City in 1929, lists as its mission:

To make a positive difference for culinarians through education, apprenticeship, and certification, while creating a fraternal bond of respect and integrity among culinarians everywhere.

Now headquartered in St. Augustine, Florida, the ACF accomplishes its mission by hosting regional and national conferences and conventions, where trends and new ideas can be learned and shared; by promoting standards for culinary education in academic and on-the-job training programs; through sponsorship of culinary competitions on regional, national, and international levels; by researching and analyzing national and international trends in cooking and baking, and by passing the information on to its members, associates, and partners; and, finally, by continuing to promote professional cooks and chefs as artisans, leaders, educators, and managers to the American public and to the world at large.

The network of professional cooks and chefs who make up the membership and partners of the ACF reaches across the United States and into the global community. ACF is a member of the World Association of Cooks Societies (WACS), and currently holds that organization's presidium (the representative board of directors for WACS) for a four-year term (2004–2008).



## SETTING THE BAR FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The career path of the chef in the twenty-first century requires a lifetime of learning, progressive skills development, and pro-

fessional networking. To serve as guideposts along that long path, the ACF professional cooks and chefs certification program was devised in the early 1970s as a validation process, for three primary purposes:

- To measure the competencies of both cooks and chefs at various stages of their professional development.
- To set a national standard for developing professional chef careers.
- To serve as a means to measure success throughout the process.

At the same time, the ACF began formulating its national apprenticeship program, funded through a federal grant program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. A critical requirement of that program was that all apprentice instructors had to be certified to teach culinary arts. Few cooks and chefs at that time had graduated from formal culinary schools, so a formalized validation process—taking into consideration education, experience, and dedication to the profession—was necessary to give integrity to all formal culinary education programs.

In acknowledgment of that necessity, the ACF developed its first certification program in the early 1970s under the guidance of Johannes Verdonkschot, CEC, AAC, who was then executive chef of the famous Missouri Athletic Club in St. Louis, Missouri, and chair of the newly appointed Committee for Certification of Executive Chefs under ACF president Jack Sullivan's administration (1967–1973). That first attempt to certify culinary ability was limited to the executive chef level only, though it quickly became evident that, for the program to gain national acceptance, it would have to become a measurable and obtainable process that evaluated a professional's entire portfolio of skills.

Taking up the challenge to devise a national certification program for cooks and chefs that would measure successes, test competencies, and require continuing education for a lifetime of career development were three pioneering chefs: L. Edwin Brown, an instructor at the Boyce Campus of the Community College of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (who later became the ACF executive director from 1980–1994); Ferdinand Metz (at the time working as a research chef for

Heinz Corporation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, before taking the position of president of the Culinary Institute of America, and later ACF's twelfth national president); and Jack Braun, a Pittsburgh restaurateur (who would become ACF's fourteenth national president).

The three chefs began by researching existing certification programs from other national agencies. In particular, they studied national organizations such as the Dietary Managers' Association, the American Hotel and Motel Association, and the Club Managers' Association, which already had successful certification programs. By comparing the guidelines from each of those programs, Brown, Metz, and Braun were able to build a framework for culinary certifications based on the same overriding principles.

The basis of certification for all three agencies included formal and informal education, measurable competencies, testing, and continuing education as a requisite for maintaining already earned certifications. The ACF certification "ladder," initially composed of five levels, was successfully launched at the ACF 1973 National Convention in Miami, Florida. These levels were:

- Certified Apprentice
- Certified Cook
- Certified Working Chef
- Certified Executive Chef
- Certified Master Chef

Baking and pastry parallel certifications were also created at the same time. Other certification levels such as Culinary Educator soon followed.



## GAINING DISTINCTION

As late as the middle of the 1970s, the U.S. Department of Labor in its highly regarded *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* classified the positions of cook and chef as "domestics," alongside household cooks, maids, and chauffeurs. This misnomer went largely unnoticed by most culinarians, who were too busy working

their way up their career ladder to pay attention to occupational listings. But as the concepts of professional development for cooks and chefs began to take shape, thanks to the development and implementation of the ACF apprenticeship and certification programs, the definition of "chef" as a distinct occupation began to take entirely new form.

But it took the focused efforts of one man, Louis I. Szathmary, the famous chef-owner of The Bakery in Chicago, Illinois, to make the occupational break from "domestic" complete and final. It was at the 1974 ACF National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, that Chef Szathmary implored the members of the American Culinary Federation to lead a brigade to Washington, D.C., to have the occupational category of "chef" made separate and distinct. With his now-famous speech, "Greeting Fellow Domestics," Szathmary had the delegates on their feet, inspiring them with hope and drive.

Szathmary (1919–1996) was a nontraditionalist chef who earned a doctorate in psychology from the University of Budapest, Hungary, in 1944 before deciding to pursue a career as a professional chef and restaurateur. But it wasn't until he emigrated to the United States in 1951 that he would find success in his chosen field. Chef Szathmary worked hard to build a reputation for himself and the fine food he served at The Bakery, the restaurant he opened in the Windy City in 1962. In both efforts he succeeded admirably.

Two who were later impressed by Szathmary were in the audience when he gave his enlightened speech in 1974: Dr. Lewis J. Minor, founder of the L.J. Minor Corporation, a national soup and sauce base company, and retired Army Lieutenant General John McLaughlin, who had recently taken over as CEO and president of the Minor Corporation. They decided to join forces with Szathmary, and together they launched a political campaign that would change the status of the American chef forever.

It took two years of determination, research, intense interviewing, and lobbying to convince the federal government, but finally, at the 1976 ACF National Convention, General McLaughlin was able to announce that they had succeeded in convincing the U.S. Department of Labor to officially recognize the American cook and chef as a professional occupational category.



## THE NEW PROFESSIONAL CHEF

The roles and responsibilities of the cook and chef have been evolving continually since the earliest culinary practitioners donned their aprons. In particular, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the roles of the cook and chef had to make great strides to keep pace with advancements in sciences and technologies and to meet the growing demands of the emerging discipline.

One who had enormous influence on the profession early on was the great French chef Auguste Escoffier (author of *Le Guide Culinaire*, 1902). By the time he laid down his knife, chefs had fully emerged as artisans—artisans with a scientific precision. Recipes, along with the cooking techniques required to make them, became standardized and tested throughout the modern world. Even the kitchen was reorganized by Escoffier, to generate greater efficiencies and enable cooks and chefs to prepare outstanding food with precision and consistent quality. From the apprentice to the executive chef, the stations of the kitchen were established, along with well-defined roles and responsibilities. To this day, ACF's certification program requires candidates to reference the works of Escoffier as the foundation of modern cooking.

By the turn of the twentieth century, America had earned a reputation for fine food—though it still “borrowed” most of its celebrity chefs from European countries. Charles Ranhofer, who worked for Delmonico's in New York City from 1862 to 1894, was perhaps the first French chef to make a name for himself in an American restaurant. When, in 1893, the Waldorf Hotel opened at the opposite end of Manhattan in direct competition to Delmonico's, the battle to attract customers and keep them coming back was underway.

Competition in the culinary and hospitality industry continued to intensify from that point forward, until the stock market crash in 1929 (ironically, the same year the ACF was formed). As for virtually all industries across the board, the years of the Great Depression had a devastating effect on the hospitality industry, and it wasn't until after World War II that American restaurants, hotels, and resorts began to prosper once again.

This once again opened opportunities for employment, but this time to a new class of American trained cooks and chefs. For the immigration of trained European chefs to America began to slow at the same time culinary schools in this country began opening their doors. In 1946, the Culinary Institute of America was one of the first to focus its educational programs on professional cooking at its New Haven, Connecticut, campus. Today there are more than 1,000 professional-track culinary educational programs in the United States, and hundreds more worldwide.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, hundreds of restaurant concepts were tested and dozens of chain restaurants and new hotels were launched. With each opening new career opportunities for the cook and chef presented themselves, and ultimately grew to encompass all economic strata and cross all cultural and geographic boundaries.



## **THE FUTURE OF THE CULINARY PROFESSION**

Today's modern cooks and chefs must be flexible and adept in order to survive in this large and varied industry. They can no longer afford to train for, say, just grand hotels, or private clubs, or fancy restaurants; rather, they must have capabilities that apply to the larger industry, that incorporate all facets of food styles and service. It is by having multiple skills, varied experience, and a broad knowledge of food and drinks that a modern culinarian can help ensure his or her success.

The ACF's certification program was designed to accommodate these broad-based professional careers, which all share a similar profile of education, training, and execution. The types of foodservice and hospitality operations may be diverse, but the parameters that support them are all the same: good, healthy food; outstanding service; fair value; and a clean, safe environment in which to enjoy them. The modern professional cook and chef must study and train in all facets of quality foodservice to maximize their career potentials. Though cooking and baking remain the foundation upon which all professional chef careers are based, today's culinarians are expected to also know

about sanitation and food safety, nutritional cooking, food costs, supervision, and management.

Notably, those entering culinary administration, a new tract for foodservice professionals in the twenty-first century, must acquire business and financial management skills equal to or better than their cooking and baking knowledge, in order to supervise large and complex foodservice and hospitality operations. Though they will supervise chefs and the production and service of the food, their greater concerns often will be costs, expenses, and profits of the operation for which they are responsible. Together with the chefs and pastry chefs they supervise, they must function as a team, relying on each other's strengths, if they are to run large, popular, and profitable organizations.

It is through ACF certification that all culinary team players can be assured of having the skills and knowledge they need to do the jobs they are hired for. At all levels of the profession, in all facets of the foodservice industry, it takes the ACF framework of skills and knowledge, coupled with a continuous drive to learn and share that learning, that defines today's professional chef.