

Chefs Find Challenging New Careers at Senior Living Communities

Every morning, chef Alon Hershkowitz's favorite diner sings his praises for creating an exceptional breakfast experience. And it's the same when this customer returns for lunch and dinner.

But Hershkowitz and his favorite diner aren't the average chef and customer that one might see in a local

community that are dispelling the old-fashioned stereotypes of older adults and institutional dining experiences — and raising the bar to meet their residents' growing expectations.

In demand are chefs with extensive culinary backgrounds needed to create dining rooms that rival area restaurants.

The Israeli-born Hershkowitz offers a wealth of knowledge and talent to The Palace, having a resume that includes several of south Florida's leading hotels and country clubs, including The National Hotel in Miami Beach. Under his culinary guidance, The Palace marries residents' desires for comfort foods such as meat loaf and brisket with Hershkowitz's flair for creating French, Italian and Mediterranean specialties.

"We have a captive audience dining every day in the same restaurant," Hershkowitz said. "Their dining experiences have to be special. Every night they tell their families what they had for dinner. Since joining The

Palace, I've taken the menu selections up a notch and have received rave reviews from residents and families."

Senior Resource Group, another retirement living provider, shares The Palace's commitment to providing exceptional dining experiences. The Solana Beach-based company recruited Roger Dikon as executive chef of The Carlisle Palm Beach, a resort-style senior living community in Lantana, Florida, which it manages and operates. Prior to joining The Carlisle Palm Beach, Dikon served in the same capacity for PGA Resort in Palm Beach.

"One of the keys to cooking for seniors is to have a presentation that is appealing to the eye," said Dikon, who has worked at the community for more than two years. "They are no different than any customer who's 'wowed' by orchid garnishes and other visual cues. It's important to use top quality cuts of meat and seafood, and the freshest vegetables."

Resident favorites include ethnic dishes such as sweet and sour cabbage soup and calf's liver with grilled apple,

bacon and onions. They also enjoy Asian roast duckling apricots, Veal Osso Buco and Hawaiian teriyaki dishes.

As people age, there's a natural decline in their senses of taste and smell. The chefs compensate by increasing the intensity of the dish's flavor and aroma with fresh, roasted garlic, herbs and special sauces and purees.

"Dining has to be both enjoyable and healthy," said Hershkowitz, whose quesadillas were especially popular with Oscar winner, Jamie Foxx. "We understand the need for limited to almost no sodium and sugar intake, and use no-salt seasonings. We also offer a wide variety of sugar-free desserts."

While neither chef could have predicted a career in the senior housing industry, the move has had significant rewards and advantages.

"Business is constant," Dikon said. "While hotels and restaurants may suffer through the slow season, it's



Roger Dikon, The Carlisle Palm Beach

enjoyable to know that we maintain a steady flow of diners no matter what night of the week, which keeps our staff on their toes at all times."

The chef, who was selected to cook for the Dalai Lama when he visited the Hawaiian Islands, also likes being able to personally get to know his customers and their preferences and special requests. He finds working at The Carlisle less stressful, and with the earlier dining schedule, his restaurant staff is able to spend more time with their families.

Hershkowitz agrees, "My wife wanted to see me more. Now that I'm able to be home by 7 p.m., she's much happier."



Alon Hershkowitz, The Palace Royale

restaurant. Hershkowitz is the executive chef at The Palace Restaurant and The Palace Royale, assisted living communities in Miami, Florida. The customer? A resident in the community who expects a top quality experience every time he dines.

The Palace is among a select group of senior housing

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Performance Foodservice-Milton's sales staff



Adddy's Dutch Cafe, Adddy Sulley; Food Sales East, Rusty Sigmon; Roland, Trevor Whitley



Big Easy Café, Tammy Miller; Vie de France, Spencer Street; Big Easy Café, Caroline Lewis



River's End, Ron Neill; Cohen Food Brokerage, Doe Cohen



KeyImpact Sales, Rick Franklin; Campbell's, Bob Hogberg; Wes-Man's Restaurant, Wes Man; KeyImpact Sales, Matt McKenzie, Michael Weinstein



Smithfield, Phil Clark; Greek Life Management, Sidney Corum, Bernadette Corum; Milton's, Gene Miller



Milton's, Karen Allen; Curt's Restaurant, Sharon Lance-Hutchins; Milton's, Danny Berry



Lone Star Bakery, Fran Torrence; Anchovi's Pizza, Chad Keller, Michelle Keller; Sunbelt Foods Company, Don Powell



Always Fresh Market, Michelle Weimer; Milton's, Michael Schier; Always Fresh Market, Joel Guldenschuh