

Chris Currah

Hotel and Restaurant Management, 1993

Chris Currah has become one of Prince Edward County's favourite restaurateurs. As the owner/operator of Currah's Café and Restaurant in downtown Picton, his specialties include fresh seafood, gourmet coffees and Ontario VQA wines. After graduating from Hotel and Restaurant Management at Loyalist College in 1993, Chris worked at the Banff Resort for 15 months. He returned to Picton in the role of general manager for the opening of the Waring House Restaurant. He then partnered with the owners of the Merrill Inn to launch their food and beverage operation. That success led to the opening of his own café and restaurant in the old Bristol Building on Main Street beside the Regent Theatre in Picton.

The menu at Currah's suggests a tempting selection. The famous Currah's Combo is a seafood platter for two, comprised of broiled lobster tails, a pound of succulent king crab legs, blackened Gulf shrimp and a fillet of honey-fried pickerel. For dessert, you might try a silk chocolate truffle flan. Chris added a lounge in the back of the restaurant that evolved into an upscale setting for private functions. "I added the lounge in our second year, needing space for guests to wait in. This room turned out to be more than a waiting area. It evolved into a beautiful, cozy spot that now has a steady clientele of regulars. We offer billiards, chess and a full second bar. This lounge is available to be booked privately for dinner parties." With Currah's Café Catering, Chris has tripled his catering business in recent years.

He credits his success to his loyal staff. "Many have been with me longer than industry standards would estimate and some since 1998. People treated with respect, given an opportunity to work on their own and trusted for the decisions they make – this equals happy staff. We have a fun and pleasant work environment. Without good staff the business is nothing." Maintaining staff in the hospitality industry is a testament to his disposition and management skills.

Reflecting on his time spent at Loyalist College, Chris speaks about the expertise and confidence that he gained. "Although the hospitality business is mainly driven by younger people, confidence to believe in yourself at the age of 19 is really necessary. The skills I learned at Loyalist College allowed me to experience every aspect of the operations at the Banff Hotel from dining room to cooking to room service. With the start up at the Waring House I had a skill base to deal with accounting, wine purchases and kitchen management. These are all areas that I had knowledge of from the Loyalist program."

When asked what advice he would give to someone wanting to start a restaurant, he responds, "Surround yourself with great people. Not just your managers and employees, but you must find a like-minded accountant, bank manager, lawyer and bookkeeper to instill and maintain confidence through what may be some very difficult times. Anyone can run a business 95% of

the time when there are few, if any problems. It is the other 5% that you need to worry about.”

Chris makes time to be involved in community and local fundraising events. Each year he handles all the food/beverage requirements for the music concert at the ‘Ride to Remember’ annual charity motorcycle rally. The profits from this event go to the Camp Trillium Fund. They partner with fundraisers such as The Maker’s Hand, Community Care for Seniors and many events for the Rotary Club. Currah's Café and Restaurant received the Reader's Choice Award for Favourite Dining Room from 2001 through 2004 and Favourite Caterer from 2002 through 2004. In 2000, Business Directions honoured Currah's with an award for outstanding business achievement.

The instructors at Loyalist remember Chris as one of the best waiters that Club 213 has ever seen.