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Q&A

ANTOINETTE BRUNO

StarChefs.com
CEO & Editor-in-Chief
New York, NY

Q: HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE FOOD-SERVICE INDUSTRY?

A: My first food service job was at a diner in Ocean City, MD when I was 12: I peeled the potatoes. I eventually became the prep cook and then moved on to the Crepe and Omelet Place where I made crepes for guests

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in the dining room. I also worked at The Zazarac Sea Pub as a bar back, and waitress at the Mug and Mallet Crab House—among many other jobs to pay my way through school. As I didn't see food service as a career then, I set my sights on Wall Street, attending the London School of Economics along the way, and eventually becoming a Vice President at Salomon Brothers. But I missed the frenzy of the restaurant world, ultimately chucking my high paying job to attend the Chefs' Program at the Ritz Escoffier in Paris. After staves in France and culinary school under my belt, I came to the conclusion that I wouldn't make a great executive chef so I went back to school again, Harvard Business School this time and looked for another role in the food service world. Fortunately I met the founders — Bob Giraldi, Phil Suarez, Patti Greaney, and Fern Berman and worked on the StarChefs business plan in its early days. I saw the mission of StarChefs to give chefs the tools they need to succeed to be the best they can be in this fractious and ever so competitive industry. In 1999 I became CEO of StarChefs.com, combining my culinary training and business know-how.

Q: WHAT MAKES THE STARCHEFS' NEW YORK EVENT DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS?

A: StarChefs events are about experiencing the best culinary talent of one city in one night. Unlike a food service or charity event, top chefs prepare fully composed hi-concept dishes on china in tasting size portions — dishes they served me at their restaurants. Each dish is

paired with and served alongside a fine wine or beer as selected by the Rising Star sommelier. The events take place in beautiful venues with great music and great cocktails.

Q: CAN YOU GIVE US A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF STARCHEFS?

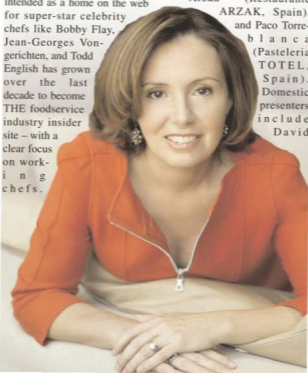
A: Bob Giraldi, Phil Suarez, Patti Greaney, and Fern Berman founded StarChefs in 1995 as the first online magazine of any kind. Bob Giraldi was the first commercial television director to put an athlete in a commercial in the 1970s, in "Miller Lite Tastes Great Less Filling," the first to put a musician, Michael Jackson, in the Pepsi Generation commercial, and saw Chefs as the new rock stars of the millennium. What was originally intended as a home on the web for super-star celebrity chefs like Bobby Flay, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, and Todd English has grown over the last decade to become THE foodservice industry insider site — with a clear focus on working chefs.

StarChefs.com is about identifying and featuring the best chefs in the industry — not because they are on TV, but because they are talented, innovative, passionate, and driven individuals who contribute greatly to our culinary community. StarChefs' mission is to serve as a catalyst for culinary professionals to succeed at the highest possible standard, and to give them the tools that they need, to meet and overcome the many challenges they face.

Q: WHAT'S THE GOAL OF THE CHEFS' CONGRESS?

A: This year, the International Chefs Congress will be held on September 20-22 at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City. Highlights of the three-day Congress will include presentations by international presenters including Pierre Gagnaire (Pierre Gagnaire, France), Yoshihiro Murata (Kikunoi & Kiamachi, Japan), Juan Mari Arzak (Restaurante ARZAK, Spain), and Paco Torreblanca (Pastelería TOLÉ, Spain). Domestic presenters include David

Bouley (Bouley, New York), Charles Phan (The Slanted Door, San Francisco), José Andrés (minibar by José Andrés Washington DC, Bazaar by José Andrés, Los Angeles, Daniel Boulud (Café Boulud, New York), Dave Arnold and Nils Noren (The French Culinary Institute, New York), Grant Achatz (Alinea, Chicago), Audrey Saunders (Pegu Club, New York), Charlie Trotter (Charlie Trotters, Chicago), Alex Stupak (wd-50, New York), Marcus Samuelsson (Aquavit, New York) and Johnny Iuzzini (Jean Georges, New York). The three days of programming will be emceed by acclaimed foodwriters Matt and Ted Lee and Chef Richard Blais. In 2008, the food service industry reached \$558 billion in sales, and employed over 13 million people across the United States. It is the largest single employer after the US Government. In response to a growing frustration within the chef community with the lack of serious platforms for peer-to-peer dialogue about the latest ideas, trends, and everyday challenges of the increasingly complex culinary industry, my partner, Managing Editor Will Blunt, and I launched the StarChefs.com International Chefs Congress in 2006. The Congress vision was made possible by early support from Jade, Hobart, Vitamix and Winston Industries. Today 1500 culinary professionals come together annually to discuss what is going on in the industry — both good and bad — their challenges, test drive new tools, find new purveyors, and share techniques. The ICC is a tremendous opportunity for chefs from around the world to meet, share ideas, cook together and most importantly, get to know each other. The International Chefs Congress will enable a learning



exchange between some of the most visionary culinary minds in the world, and catalyze a dialogue with Chefs and the makers of the products they use. We're extremely excited to bring this landmark event to life.

Q: WHAT ARE THE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF A RISING STAR?

A: Rising Stars are up-and-coming chefs and culinary professionals who represent the vanguard of the contemporary American dining scene. They have strong, compelling culinary philosophies, are able to see beyond the four walls of their restaurant, and are committed to fostering a culinary community by sharing their knowledge with fellow professionals. Ultimately, creativity, ambition, exquisite presentation and, most important, delicious food wins a chef the designation of StarChefs Rising Star. They are the future of American cuisine. The Rising Star awards were launched in 2003 as a platform for young chefs - previously unsung in the culinary world - to be recognized broadly. Today, StarChefs has awarded 347 Rising Star Awards at 26 Rising Star Galas in 15 cities.

Q: YOU'VE RUN EVENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY; WHAT MAKES THE NEW YORK CHEFS' COMMUNITY UNIQUE?

A: That's a very general question, because the chef commu-

nity here is a veritable melting pot for cooks of all cultures and skill levels. New York City counts masters in many styles of cuisine, from Morimoto to Daniel Boulud to Mario Batali, and many that aren't even mediatized. These chefs have in turn bred a legion of talented chefs that are going for the glory that is cooking in this great city. They're all taking

their own paths to get there, but they end up meeting in many of the same kitchens. The result is that everyone knows everyone. When the communities are small, like with the mixologists or the pastry chefs, this becomes especially true. This year's crop of New York Rising Stars is especially young and hungry. They actually reflect

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quite well the breakdown of chefs you might find in New York. A lot of them are honing their skills in some of the best kitchens in the country and have work experience with more than one great chef under their belts. Some of the others are already fiercely entrepreneurial and

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A: We offer access to the top chef community in the country - attendees come from all over

the US and the world. These foodservice professionals are the influencers and are always seeking new equipment, food and tools to help them succeed. We take great pleasure in hand-selecting our exhibitors who bring these new, exciting innovations to the chef community and in turn, our exhibitors are excited to have access to this audience and engage in a two-

way dialogue with their end user. We are very particular about the quality of the products we promote. We try our best to ensure the products we market genuinely help our audience succeed.

Q: YOU'VE DEVELOPED A FOLLOWING AS A LEADER IN THE

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own their own businesses. They are doing whatever it takes to succeed in the ruthless super-competitive New York dining scene. Lastly, another one of the characteristics that the New York chef community has in particular is a very strong connection to charities. There's a different event at least every other week and the chefs are constantly participating in these. And not only the chefs - you'll find the pastry chefs, mixologists, and sommeliers participating just as much!

Q: WHAT ATTRACTS THE CELEBRITY CHEF TO THE NEW YORK EVENT?

A: New York is the ultimate measuring stick. It is a place that the chef community does business on an annual basis - chefs relish the opportunity to come to NYC, eat, network and experience what is happening in the culinary community.

Q: YOU'VE ATTRACTED SOME OF THE NATION'S

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LEADER IN THE RECRUITMENT OF CULINARY TALENT. WHAT ARE THE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS THAT YOU SEE IN THE SUCCESSFUL CHEF, TODAY?

A: In addition to hosting *Back of the House*, help wanteds and classifieds for the industry, we travel throughout the country and the world; my editorial team and I are on the ground meeting and tasting the food of countless chefs and other industry players. This first-hand experience is the basis for all the content on *StarChefs.com*. A successful chef today not only produces exceptional food but can see beyond the four walls of his/her restaurant, understands business and the culinary community at large and where they fit in. They have become people persons (dragged kicking and screaming), get that they have to manage a team, and also know what is going on in the restaurant down the street. In 2005 we began giving the *StarChefs* audience a visual account of what the *StarChefs* editorial team and I were experiencing on the road. The culture of photography - and now Video - has become part of the fabric of the *StarChefs* publishing philosophy. And now with the advent of social media, we now tweet all of our tastings, often in the moment, to provide chefs inspiration as they create new dishes.

Q: ARE WE DOING A GOOD JOB AS AN INDUSTRY OF ATTRACTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF TOP CULINARY TALENT?

A: Food TV and the Internet have done a great job of making the career of a chef to not only be acceptable as a career, but even glamorous. This is a double-edged sword. Hordes of wannabe chefs now enter culinary schools with a misconception of what it takes to succeed in this industry. Our schools need to do a better job of screening out candidates and actually deny applicants who are doomed to fail and rack up incredible debt they will never be able to pay off. In 1989, I was denied admission into the Ritz-Escoffier chefs program until I could get a recommendation having worked in a French fine-dining establishment. If every applicant had to work in a restaurant before they applied, we'd see much better candidates coming out of culinary school today.