

front & center

Todd Gold

Restaurant-owner chef finds his focus in food

By Sara Greene STAFF WRITER

Chef Todd Gold of Maumelle was inspired as a child by the Dr. Seuss book Green Eggs and Ham. He set to work one morning in his family's kitchen with an assortment of food coloring, a skillet and carton of eggs. He not only made green eggs, but also red, blue and several hues in between. It's a story his family loves to tell. He tried his hand working at Gold's House of Fashion, which was his family's clothing store in Little Rock, and a brief stint trying to be an electrician's apprentice. He found his niche in 1988 when he began working as dishwasher at Bruno's Little Italy in Little Rock. "I have attention deficit disorder, but it lets me take in a lot of information at one time and file it away for later. I've always liked being able to work with my hands. I saw the guy tossing the dough for the pizza crusts and I thought, 'That's cool. I want to do that.' I'm not sure I even knew what a chef was at that point," Gold said. He worked his way up to kitchen manager by the time he was 18. "That's influential when the owner tosses you the keys to the place and you're a teenager," Gold said. After graduating from high school he attended La Maison Meridian, which is the Memphis Culinary Academy. "I just enjoyed the heck out of it. I think I went in knowing I wanted to cook southern Italian for sure, but there are so many cooking techniques. By the end of culinary school I had gained about 35 pounds," he said. The culinary arts involve skills such as chemistry, math and history.

"Culinary school began in 1248, when French chefs formed a group to decide how to properly prepare food for the king and queen," Gold said.

After graduating from culinary school in 1992, he worked as a chef for hotels, country clubs and restaurants in the Little Rock area.

Just prior to purchasing The Purple Cow restaurants last year he was the corporate executive chef for Axiom Corporation for eight years. He describes the Purple Cow menu as American casual such as burgers, fries and shakes. He oversees operations for the two Little Rock locations, three in Texas and two in Virginia. He is also looking to add three more in Arkansas in Fayetteville, Hot Springs and Conway.

Gold is also director of the Arkansas Culinary School at Pulaski Technical College Little Rock-South, which is housed in the former Little Rock Expo Center, 13000 Interstate 30.

"Arkansas has a need for qualified culinary individuals, and I'd like to see Arkansas become a culinary destination, but you need educated men and women to open more restaurants," Gold said.

The school was started in 1995 by the Central Arkansas Chapter of the American Culinary Federation as an apprenticeship program. Gold said about three years ago he started partnership discussions with Pulaski Technical College.

He is also chairman of the Arkansas Hospital Association. Gold said the hospitality industry, which

includes the culinary arts, is one of the top five tax-producing industries in the state. There are 200 students enrolled in the Arkansas Culinary School. Degrees include the associate of applied science in culinary arts, associate of applied science in hospitality management, and technical certificates available in culinary arts, baking and pastry, and wine and spirits. The school also has a American Culinary Federation Central Arkansas Chapter Apprenticeship Program.

“I think food should be presentable, but not overly fancy. It should just be part of the plate, prepared properly with good flavor. Food is food. When you cook a meal and visit with patrons afterward to talk about why this food was paired with that wine — it’s very gratifying,” Gold said.

He said his job has evolved from being a fixture in the kitchen to management.

“Some days balancing the school and the business works out nicely, but there are days when everything goes wrong everywhere. It is a challenge to do both, and I like to keep moving,” Gold said.

Many Little Rock chefs have inspired Gold during his career, including Jay and Vince Bruno of Bruno’s Little Italy, Wally Gieringer of La Scala Italian Restaurant and Ed Hornyak, chef at Performance Food Group.

When it comes to having a famous role model, Gold doesn’t pick one but does know who he doesn’t want to be like — Gordon Ramsay, who is the hot tempered chef on the television show Hell’s Kitchen.

“I don’t like the way he treats people, and I’ve never been that way,” Gold said.

Gold is a member of three professional organizations, the American Culinary Federation, the National Restaurant Association and the Chaine Des Rotisseurs. He is the third chef in Arkansas to be inducted into the Chaine Des Rotisseurs, which is an international food and wine society.

He also has received several awards from the organizations.

Gold received the American Culinary Federation’s President’s Award in 2000, the Pursuit of Excellence Award in 2001, and Chef of the Year awards in 2003 and 2006. He was inducted into its Hall of Fame in 2005 and serves as president of the Arkansas chapter.

Gold is also president of the local chapter of the National Restaurant Association and has been on the board of directors since 2002. In 2004, he was named the association’s Outstanding Chef of the Year. Last year Gold received Restaurateur of the Year awards from both the National Restaurant Association and the Arkansas Hospitality Association.

Even with all the hats he wears, Gold finds time to cook for good causes. He was chairman of the Kidney Foundation’s Great Chefs event from 1997 to 2002, and again in 2005. His other volunteer projects span from hurricane-relief cooking to assisting St. Vincent’s New Outlook program. He has been recognized for his philanthropy with the Formica-Ben E. Keith Culinary Community Service Award in 2002 and 2007.

Visitors who stop by the Golds’ home in Maumelle probably won’t find the chef in the kitchen.

“I try to cook at home, but the kids would just as soon have macaroni and cheese than anything I could make,” Gold said. matter of fact

I was born: Nov. 6, 1972.

My family includes: My wife, Cindy; daughter, Gracey, 5; son, Noah, 3, and three cats: Oliver, Bella and Romeo, although with a 5-year-old and 3-year-old, the cats' names tend to change a lot.

I am a: Certified executive chef, culinary administrator and member of the American Academy of Chefs.

One thing I'm not good at cooking is: Bakery items.

My favorite cookbook is: In The World Kitchen: Global Cuisine.

What inspires me daily is: The opportunity to have a successful day by taking care of the people around me.

The advice I'd give to someone entering the culinary arts is: Have a passion for it. It has to be in your heart, as well as your hands and mind.

My favorite saying is: Keep moving forward. I'm full of little sayings, but I think that one says a lot.

One of my favorite memories is: Standing in my grandma Sarah Gold's kitchen picking chicken and making matzo ball soup. Her appreciation for detail rubbed off on me at an early age.

One thing not a lot of people know about me is: Deep down I'm really a shy person.



Todd Gold of Maumelle is a chef, owner of The Purple Cow restaurants, and director of the Arkansas Culinary School at Pulaski Technical College Little Rock-South. PHOTO BY RUSTY HUBBARD



PHOTO BY RUSTY HUBBARD Todd Gold, right, chats with café manager Kevin Sikes at Pulaski Technical College Little Rock-South.