60 SECONDS WITH CHEF DAVID TEIG

Chef David Teig traces his culinary roots back to his youth in upstate New York, where he began washing dishes at a local Buddhist ashram as a teenager. His training has included work at a three-star Michelin restaurant in France along with a number of private and hotel restaurants in Europe and the United States. Before he became the resident chef for McKinley’s Grille at the Sheraton Fairplex in Pomona, he traveled for Starwood Hotels doing openings and providing operational support. He currently runs the hotel restaurant as well as overseeing the entire Los Angeles County Fairplex food operations year-round.

What were some of the greatest influences on your food career?
I grew up in a rural area, with dairy farmers for neighbors, so there was always access to great local products. I was cooking organic before organic was cool, before anyone even knew what it was. So I am used to sourcing local, which is what we do now at the Fairplex, where we have our own farm. On our three-quarters of an acre, we grow stone fruits, almonds, tomatoes, squash, zucchini, Japanese mustard and other fruits and vegetables that we use in our kitchen. We even have a horticulturalist on staff at the Fairplex to advise us.

Where do you find your recipes?
Many are my own invention. I might see a product at the Claremont Farmer’s Market, or something I come across, such as catering all the events at the Fairplex, than it would be to run my own small restaurant.

What is your philosophy of cooking?
Balance and flavor are what cooking is about. You don’t want a dish to be too salty or too sweet. A lot of the sauce work I learned in France helps as well.

What are your job’s greatest rewards?
I enjoy developing cooks and managers. They are a reflection of me as a chef. Basically, I am a food guy who enjoys eating. One of my favorite events is our Table to Farm dinner, when we grill food and serve guests right on the Fairplex farm.

What advice would you give to up-and-coming chefs?
Work hard and get yourself under the tutelage of people who are super knowledgeable. One of my own “chef heroes” was Olivier Roellinger, chef of Les Maisons de Brie in Brittany, France, where I trained. The people you surround yourself with are important. You are a reflection of the people you encounter along the way.

— Penny E. Schwartz