

Food In Motion hits 'uncharted waters' to success



By Brock Weir

Hollywood arrives in city this week for the annual Toronto International Film Festival and as the stars get ready to walk the red carpet, Aurora's John Cosentino will be a man in motion.

In partnership with DiLiso's Fine Meats, a St. Lawrence Market staple, Cosentino, 34, and his chefs will be hard at work feeding over 3,500 industry and media insiders from 9 a.m. to 4 a.m. throughout the span of TIFF.

'We are going to be in uncharted waters,' says Cosentino, founder of Food In Motion, the Aurora-based catering business on Vata Court. 'Cooking for this many people in a seven-day span is new to us and it is going to be a huge learning experience.'

This is shaping up to be a busy week for Cosentino and his team. Not only will they be caught up in the perfect storm of glitz and mayhem only TIFF can provide, they are also preparing to mark their first anniversary on September 14 as a local success story.

While TIFF might be a huge learning experience, Cosentino has never shied away from a learning challenge.

The Richmond Hill native was once a professional baseball player, a pitcher studying global management. Travelling to Italy for a one-year stint playing pro ball in Europe, however, threw him an unexpected professional curveball.

'When I showed up at the airport, there was a team representative and he handed me a manila envelope with directions to my flat from the airport, directions to the field from my flat, and the keys to a standard '89 Ford Escort I didn't know how to drive,' he recalls. 'When I finally got to my flat after a 15-20 minute drive which actually took me about three hours because I had to teach myself how to drive standard that day, I got to the flat and found just a mini-bar fridge.'

'I had to teach myself to go out every day to supply myself with the produce, literally just shopping for the meal. I said, 'I can do this' and got the chance to start cooking a lot more for my roommates and teammates in Italy and by the end of the season I was actually cooking for local families and that was really cool.'

From there, he barely looked back. Finishing his undergraduate degree in West Virginia, he came home and went to chef school at George Brown College. He credits his degree in Global Management to helping him understand the importance of building the right kinds of relationships but says the transition from that world to the kitchen was relatively seamless as there too you need order to be able to function on a daily basis.

'Baseball got me my education and then it got me to what I now consider my career,' he says.

With his fiancée, a native Auroran, Cosentino set out to chart these uncharted waters, eventually zeroing in on an Aurora-based catering company.

'The number one thing people in the industry would tell a young apprentice is, 'Listen, if you don't really love this, get out,' because financially it is a bit of a struggle, especially when you are starting out,' he recalls. 'A lot of times you're working for free so you can put on your resume that you have experience working in the kitchen with a well-known chef who is established already.'

He chose a slightly different path, leveraging his undergrad degree and his culinary degree to get the money flowing in as soon as possible.

For the past six years, he has been a regular fixture at the Toronto Food Terminal, cooking hearty breakfasts that are more akin to lunches for the 125 employees regularly working through the night. It has proved to be a steady gig and something he credits to keeping Food In Motion 'afloat' during the lean years and also providing invaluable experience.

'It still took me five or six years of learning under chefs from north of the city, but I really took everything I learned and it was like completing a puzzle,' he says. 'You take the very best things from all these different chefs in order to build your own puzzle and make it work for yourself. I thought catering would be the best way to support myself financially.'

'It is still an uphill battle. Some people may want to plateau. Other people may want to climb and I think that what is really cool about catering is because it is a new venue with new clients every single day, you're dealing with new menus all the time, sometimes three menus a day; you can continue to be creative so you never plateau and always climb. That is more rewarding than the financial reward. I am definitely happy with my choice and where I am right now.'

And where he is now is a beautifully equipped 'Kitchen' just off Industrial Parkway South where the behind-the-scenes magic happens very much in-front-of-the-scenes with a seating area that comfortably seats 20 and is open to private events, including catering parties and team-building corporate exercises.

If all goes according to plan in their second year and beyond, Mr. Cosentino will soon look for another location to incorporate either a sandwich bar or an appetizer-and-wine bar in the Aurora area while simultaneously sticking to their catering roots.

'I have been fortunate in the first year to be able to hire some very competent, intelligent and hard-working staff,' he says. 'We have met so many people and have been overwhelmed by the support we have got from the Town, Chamber and local community. We are very thankful for all the support, we're here to stay and we just look forward to feeding the local public every day.'

For more, visit www.foodinmotion.ca.