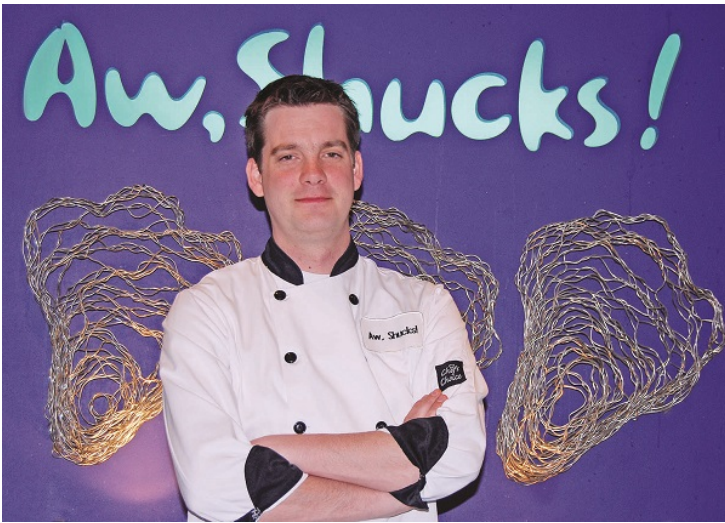


Meet your Iron Chefs: Grant Robertson



By Brock Weir

It's that time of year when Grant Robertson would rather be fishing.

Mr. Robertson grew up in Newmarket but was a frequent visitor and summer regular at his grandparents' home north of Algonquin Park where regular hunting and fishing were more than a hobby, but a way of life.

‘I remember speckled trout open up the last weekend of April and if I am not catching trout, I am picking fiddleheads,’ he recalls. ‘You can always leave with something to eat because there is always something growing around you, whether it is mushrooms, wild leeks, or whatever it might be.’

This sense of growing up with basic, but very fresh food, instilled in him a love of local produce and freshness that has been a significant foundation stone on which he has built his culinary talents.

Now a chef at Aurora's Aw Shucks! restaurant, Mr. Robertson plans on bringing this unique perspective to the Aurora Community Centre on April 18 when the arena is transformed into Kitchen Stadium for the first Iron Chef Aurora.

Iron Chef Aurora was the initiative of Debbie McGrath and Tim Newnham of Habachat, a local social media company, to showcase the tastes and talent of local restaurants. It will be followed by a three-day festival at the Community Centre called Taste of Aurora, featuring local restaurants, foodies, chefs, and health and fitness experts.

Chefs and participating restaurants are also paired up with a handful of local charities and all proceeds will be split between the five groups being supported by the initiative. Mr. Robertson and Aw Shucks are supporting Rose of Sharon, a charity to provide support for young mothers throughout York Region.

‘I love the fact it is a local charity,’ says Mr. Robertson. ‘You can see exactly where the money is going. It is local, it is not going to some corporation or a [remote] group. You actually know where it is going. I know people that have used Rose of Sharon and it doesn't matter where you are, they are just there to support you and it is a really good charity to work with.’

Although he has a firm foundation in simple food, Mr. Robertson is not averse to getting a bit extravagant when the occasion allows but seasonal and fresh are two of the most important guidelines he works with.

‘A lot of things now are available to us that we couldn't use in the winter,’ he says. ‘Originally this was planned for February, but

we said no, let's have something that local farms can grow. People can go out to the store and use the exact same ingredients as we are that are in season and are fresh. I just love locally sourced products that you can find right around here.

?One of the dishes I am doing is perch. Next weekend they open up and there are jumbo perch right out there. My biggest thing on the menu is pickerel. To me, it is a local fish. Anyone who has gone fishing up north knows it is the fish to keep. It is a sure lunch ? just fresh, fresh seafood and there is not really much more you need to do if it is that fresh.?

Finding inspiration from spending time up north with his grandparents, he eventually realised that cooking was his true passion after a stint of studying business, and set out to make a career in that field a reality. Last weekend, he gathered with a group of his friends who, like him, are on the cusp of turning 30 and get-togethers like these are constant reminders he has made the right choice.

?Just sitting down with good food, good company, that is what made me realise this is what I want to do,? he says. ?This is what I want to provide for other people to enjoy. I am a chef, and I want to own a restaurant and just look after friends, family and guests that come through the door.

?The reason I want people [to come out for Iron Chef Aurora and Taste of Aurora] is not just for Aw Shucks, but to experience what every restaurant has to offer. Each one is totally different and it is just great to work alongside everyone else and see the ideas and the techniques they have a see how their process works. Food is one of those things where you never stop learning.?