

Food Column: Uniontown native Richard Rosendale sets sights on international title

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By Rebecca Sodergren /



Although he's about to compete in one of the world's most prestigious culinary competitions, Richard Rosendale still considers himself just a kid from Uniontown.

Mr. Rosendale, executive chef of The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., hopes to become the first American chef ever to win the Bocuse d'Or, which will be held in January in Lyon, France.

The biennial competition isn't necessarily a household name in the United States, in part because Americans haven't traditionally done well there. (The highest an American has ever placed in the competition's 26-year history is fifth.) But Mr. Rosendale hopes to change all that -- and he's on his way, anticipating upcoming interviews with Bon Appetit magazine and "CBS This Morning."

He's also received an unprecedented level of support in preparing for the competition. The Greenbrier even built him an exact replica of the Bocuse d'Or kitchen inside its Cold War-era bunker. The bunker once served as a fallout shelter where the president and other dignitaries could be taken in the event of a nuclear disaster; it has 22-ton blast doors, a decontamination room, rifles, bunk beds, a dentist's office -- basically a full-service living space. The Greenbrier's owner authorized tearing out the cafeteria and refurbishing the space as a practice kitchen with \$150,000 in new equipment.

Mr. Rosendale spends about 12 hours each Monday -- otherwise his day off -- and portions of other days practicing in this kitchen with his apprentice and commis (assistant) chef Corey Siegel. Mr. Rosendale himself once served in the same three-year apprenticeship program at The Greenbrier, as well as training at a similar apprenticeship at Nemaquin and other programs around the world. He owned two fine-dining restaurants in Columbus, Ohio, before The Greenbrier wooed him back three years ago.

For the first time, several elements of the next Bocuse d'Or are a relative mystery. In the past, competitors knew two years in advance which meats and fishes they'd be working with. This time, Mr. Rosendale just found out a couple weeks ago that the 2013 competitors will prepare beef tenderloin, oxtail, beef cheeks and beef shoulder. He won't get the fish assignment until November. And the night before the competition, he'll be notified of a "mystery ingredient" that he'll need to incorporate into two of the three garnishes he plates with the meat and fish dishes.

He and Mr. Siegel will have five and a half hours to prepare their dishes and present them before the 24 judges -- one renowned chef from each competitor's home country.

But Mr. Rosendale has competed in more than 40 international culinary competitions, so the surprise elements don't scare him. For now, he thinks in terms of "salmon, flat fish or round fish" and creates possible treatments for each. For the garnishes, he comes up with several options that would work with various ingredients: potatoes, cauliflower and so on. He should be able to simply pluck some items from his repertoire when the big day arrives.

"I'm able to take some of the mystery out of it" because of previous competitive experience, he said. Still, it's a lot of work.

"It's like taking a second job," he said of all the practice time.

It's not as if he didn't already have enough to do. His schedule keeps him frequently traveling around the country. When he's home, there are 13 restaurants to manage, with 75 percent of the fruits and vegetables supplied by a farm on the premises. Since Mr. Rosendale's return to The Greenbrier, the resort has added five restaurants, a casino and the Greenbrier Classic PGA tournament, and the culinary staff he manages has increased from 28 to 185 chefs.

He deals with it all by being "fanatically organized," he said. He also meets with a personal trainer for running, cycling and boxing to help keep his energy up.

And he credits his wife, Laura, with giving him unconditional support. They have a busy house with two boys -- Laurence, 4, and Liam, 6 months -- but she supports his travel and hectic schedule.

"We've been together since the seventh grade, over 20 years," he said.

His wife isn't the only good thing that came out of Uniontown schools for him. He also found his love of cooking during a home economics class at Uniontown High School.

He hopes his experience is inspiring for some other Uniontown kid.

"I got in a lot of trouble, and my grades were average at best," he said. "It seemed so far away to be able to get to where I am now" when he was frittering away his time in school.

But if there's anything he'd like to say to that next up-and-comer from Uniontown, it's this: "You can get there from here."