

IFEC Newsletter

March 21, 2007

Happy First Full Day of Spring!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

from Mary Humann
The Humann Factor LLC

VIVA Volunteers

IFEC depends on volunteers who give their talents and time to a variety of projects – planning the annual conference, working on scholarships and more. Here's an update on what several IFEC committees are doing:

The logo taskforce (Pat Cobe, Joan Holleran and Allison Perlik) is working with graphic designer Gail Segerstrom to update the IFEC logo.

The professional development awards committee (Mary Petersen, Gail Bellamy, Patty Johnson, Don Odiorne, Sherri Daye Scott and Beth Shepard) and the student scholarship committee (Alexei Rudolf, Tom O'Brien and Chandra Ram) will be reviewing guidelines and will make awards this spring.

Plans for the Austin conference are under way. Possible Hill Country food tours and/or program speakers and presentations are being researched by Tia Woodward, Sherri Daye Scott, Karen Weisberg, Alexei Rudolf and me. Let us know if you have any suggestions.

IFEC will be needing volunteers to assist the mentoring committee (Beth Shepard and Tia Woodward) by mentoring first-time IFECers at the Austin conference. Please let Beth or Tia know if you'd like to help.

Austin Product Placements

And speaking of Austin, you should have received a Product Presentation form by email. The form lists the many opportunities to show off your products and services during the IFEC conference in Austin – from meals to gift bag items to the chef showcase. Please return your requests to the IFEC office by May 7th.

IFEC Website

The new and improved IFEC website (<http://www.ifeconline.com/>) is up and running and for the first time ever, you are invited to renew your membership online.

Check it out and let us know how we can improve the website for you.

Look forward to seeing you at the IFEC reception at NRA, Monday, May 21 – location to be announced!

BUSINESS BITES

Sahlman Williams President **John Williams** announces that his agency has been named the agency of record for the Vidalia Onion Committee. Their other Georgia food clients are the Georgia Peach Commission and the Georgia Pecan Commission.

Ryan O'Malley, corporate communications manager for National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, says NRAEF is always looking for new and innovative content for its Foodservice Workforce Solutions web site at <http://www.foodserviceworkforcesolutions.com/> Contact Ryan for more information: romalley@nraef.org or 312-261-5318.

Where can you get beer made out of oysters? How do you make a matcha latte? What do Fiji Indians crave when not in Fiji? According to **Xanthie Drankus**, account supervisor at Ketchum, if you don't know the answers you can learn them on <http://www.tastegurus.com/>. She says it's "an amazing new online magazine for chefs and mobile, global food enthusiasts (like you)."

Speaking of web sites, **Don Odiorne**, vp of foodservice, Idaho Potato Commission recommends <http://www.theonion.com/>, the online version of the parody newspaper The Onion.

ABOUT PEOPLE

Seen on television: **Lisa Hurley**, editor of *Special Events Magazine*, was part of an episode on "CBS Sunday Morning" on over-the-top parties. ("But as we all know, no party is over the top on my planet," says Lisa.)

Gail Bellamy, managing editor/food editor of *Restaurant Hospitality* and author of *Cleveland Food Memories* appeared on Food Network recently. Gail was interviewed about something dear to her childhood -- Chef-Boy-Ar-Dee foods. She says her parents had their first date at Chef Boyardi's Restaurant in Cleveland and her mom "passed off Chef-Boy-Ar-Dee's spaghetti sauce as her own, although to be fair, she doctored it up with a tablespoon of sugar."

Congratulations to **Rob Benes** on his promotion to Editor (from Senior Editor) for *Chef Magazine* and *Chef Educator Today*.

Here's a note from **Cate Puzo**: "Greetings my friends! Most of you know that last October I began looking for a new role in my professional life. That search led me to my new position as Senior Communications Manager for Share Our Strength in their headquarters here in D.C. I am happy to report that I'm learning lots, loving what I'm doing (and the people I'm doing it with), and am enjoying the sense of personal satisfaction at working towards a cause that is personal to me: ending childhood hunger in America."

Hooray for **Sherrie Rosenblatt**. Sherrie has been promoted to vice president of marketing and communications for National Turkey Federation. She has been with NTF for eight years, most recently as senior director of marketing and communications. Prior to NTF, Sherrie spent 15 years at Food Marketing Institute.

PEN AND PALATE

This month's topic is food safety.

Question: How have the recent outbreaks of food contamination and rats found in a Taco Bell impacted the foodservice segments in which you are involved? How have they affected -- or not -- your work as a foodservice communicator? What is your own reaction to these threats to our food safety?

Answers:

Nancy Kruse

President, The Kruse Company

The importance of food safety and its impact on menu development is something that we have researched on an ongoing basis as part of the Culinary R&D Conference sponsored each fall by *Nation's Restaurant News*. Most recent input from corporate chefs suggests that there is growing reliance on food science as a specific response to food safety concerns. Many chain chefs see a closer marriage of food science with the culinary arts so that issues relating to food safety and handling are addressed from the inception of a menu item. Some chains, like Cheesecake Factory, have dedicated risk services departments that ensure that food safety principles are observed throughout the organization. Chefs also forecast greater emphasis on HACCP and indicate that they will rely more heavily on their suppliers to provide HACCP certification.

My own reaction to the seemingly endless reports of foodborne illness (E-coli, norovirus, hepatitis, salmonella, et al) and dirty stores is one of complete dismay, especially since there seems to be an absence of unflinching resolve on the part of the industry to fix the safety problem. That's the challenge. The opportunity is for the restaurant business to step up to the plate and make a strong, public commitment to addressing the issue with clearly stated initiatives and objectives. It's a dirty shame that we seem to be approaching a point at which consumers will need special health insurance just to eat in our stores.

Annika Stensson

Manager, Media Relations, National Restaurant Association

Working here at the National Restaurant Association, these food safety scares/outbreaks have been a pretty big deal as most of our members were affected by it. Working for restaurants, this issue is sometimes difficult as we often receive the final blow even though the product may show up at our door already contaminated by no fault of the restaurant. But, that's eventually where people get sick, so that's what sticks in people's minds. We have fielded hundreds of media calls through last fall and so far this year on foodborne illness outbreaks and have managed to get our expert quoted in a good number of them to balance the coverage out. Trade publications are usually more understanding of this issue and want in-depth, useful information, but quite often, consumer media go a little more sensational route, giving the industry a hard time.

In addition, we have focused our attention more on produce safety as a result of the spinach and green onion contaminations of last fall, and are increasing our communication with other industry groups and government agencies to find solutions. We have also convened an internal working group that is drafting guidelines for restaurateurs on how to ensure safe produce and work with suppliers and growers to get it. From farm to table, we all share responsibility in providing safe food to consumers and it's important to promote awareness of the importance of every link in the supply chain.

Patty Fitzgerald

Editor, School Foodservice & Nutrition

The food-safety spotlight is always on school nutrition operations--especially during television "sweeps" periods, when panic-button news and feature stories are scheduled. And when food-safety incidents occur in retail or commercial foodservice, attention quickly diverts to our segment, as well. In addition, new federal regulations now require every school (not district) participating in national meal programs to develop food-safety plans based on HACCP principles and to have at least two health inspections every year. These are both unfunded mandates.

Recently, a Center for Science in the Public Interest study found that a vast number of schools were not meeting the health inspection requirement. While the study put the "blame" on local and state departments of health for not conducting the inspections, the news media focused on school cafeterias, perpetuating the misperception that a lack of inspection is the equivalent of a failed inspection.

This negative media attention has been frustrating to School Nutrition Association members and Headquarters staff, particularly because numerous private and government studies have found that meals served at school have a better food-safety record than those prepared in anywhere else--including home. Our reputation for safe meals is an area of pride and one that is continually and unfairly challenged time and again.

As a foodservice communicator, I have found that my publications need to keep sounding the message that food safety needs to be a top priority for all readers. In addition, I and others on my team keep seeking opportunities to challenge stereotypes in the general public. Sometimes it feels like a Sisyphean effort; we just keep rolling that rock back up that hill, only for it slip away over and over.

Melinda M. Morgan, APR

Principal, Morgan Marketing & Public Relations LLC

As a public relations firm that specializes in the foodservice industry, we started to feel the impact of these outbreaks right away and believe they will not disappear anytime soon. They have opened many of our clients' eyes to the damaging effects that media can have on business -- even from an isolated event. Therefore, we are developing crisis management plans for several of our clients that outline immediate duties of company leaders and key messages for communicating to employees, media, vendors and other stakeholders. The agency is also recommending media training for key spokespeople with a focus on crisis scenarios.

While certain concepts already have a crisis management plan in place, recent events have caused them to revisit relevant materials and policies for needed updates and review. For example, one of our clients has decided to implement a drill for training purposes on how a media related and/or food safety crisis should be handled. They are also creating wallet-sized contact cards for all members of the "Crisis Response Group."

Within our agency, we have maintained (and increased) efforts to monitor industry, consumer and business media to identify potential trends and issues that can affect how our clients plan for crises.

JOB POSTINGS

Senior Account Manager, NYC

Lewis & Neale, a food PR/marketing agency in New York City, is conducting a search for a Senior Account Manager. The candidate must have at least three years experience in public relations, excellent management and writing skills, be passionate about food and live in the NYC area. E-mail resume and salary requirements to annette@lewis-neale.com

Field Manager, Share Our Strength, Chicago

Share Our Strength seeks a Mid West Region Field Manager to manage Taste of the Nation program and other related activities in the Mid West. The Field Manager is responsible for the development and implementation of a leadership and fundraising strategy for Taste of the Nation and will serve as the manager and primary motivator of local volunteers, corporate sponsors, chefs and restaurants. Contact Cate Puzo at cpuzo@strength.org

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

The 2007 conference will be at the Omni Austin Hotel in the live music capital of the world, Austin, Texas, Monday November 5 – Thursday November 8, 2007. The 2008 conference is planned for Cleveland, Ohio, home of the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame. Cleveland dates to be determined.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS & NEW WEB SITE

Don't forget to renew your membership online at <http://www.ifeconline.com/> While you can renew online, you will need to send a check (\$275 for a renewed membership; \$375 for a new one). Payments must be received by May 1st in order to maintain your membership through April 30, 2008. While you're on the site, please take a moment to check out the directory and the various ways to locate members and their products, services, magazines and organizations.

Do you have a new job, a new client, a new project, a job opening – any news of interest to IFECers? Please let us know by emailing to ifec@aol.com.

The IFEC Newsletter is a monthly online publication for IFEC members

Edited by Carol Lally, executive director