

# PETER SOKOLSKI

## Cactus Blue Mexican Restaurant

*Courage • Transformation • Purpose*



Before he ever stepped into a professional kitchen, Peter Sokolski was a rebel looking for direction. Raised in and around Philadelphia and shaped by long bus rides, city grit, and graffiti-covered streets, he always carried a fighter's spirit...sometimes literally. Kicked out of multiple schools for fighting and reckless behavior, he called himself "a rebel without a cause" before he had the courage to admit he was also a young man lost in survival mode.

Soccer gave him something to focus on, earning him induction into the North Catholic High School Hall of Fame, but even athletic discipline couldn't fill the deeper void. That emptiness found fuel in alcohol. What began as weekend partying spiraled into years of addiction. He hid it well — functioning, working, showing up — but losing himself piece by piece along the way. Addiction doesn't always look like rock bottom. Sometimes it looks like another shift, another laugh, another drink.

Everything changed on December 10, 2017 — the day Peter decided he wasn't going to die from alcohol. That day became his turning point. He leaned into Alcoholics Anonymous, found strength in fellow chefs in recovery, and reached out to a power greater than himself. But he'll tell you the person who helped him choose life — and keep choosing it — was his wife, Lauren. Her love didn't just save him; it helped him become who he was meant to be.

And that man is a chef.

Peter didn't go to culinary school. He built himself the *long way*. Dishwasher. Prep cook. Line cook. Sous chef. Executive chef. Eighteen years in the kitchen taught him more than technique — it taught him humility, leadership, and faith in second chances. Trained by international chefs and industry workhorses, Peter found not just a job, but a purpose. Cooking became his craft. The kitchen became his classroom. And feeding people became his way of giving back.

Today, Peter is 18 years into his culinary career and proudly wears the title of Chef at Cactus Blue Mexican Restaurant. He is also a husband, a father to Ella and Charlotte, and a man of faith and gratitude. He still carries his past with him — but now he uses it as fuel, not weight. The graffiti that once reflected the chaos of his youth now reminds him of resilience and street-born artistry — proof that beauty can rise from broken places.

This portrait doesn't just show a chef.

It shows a survivor.

A fighter.

A man who chose his family — and himself — over his demons.

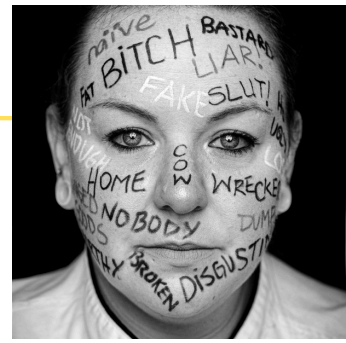
Behind the apron, Peter found purpose.

Beyond it, he found redemption.

# HEATHER WILLIAMS

## Rustic Creations by Heather Williams

*Courage • Scars • Power*



Some scars we carry on our bodies. Others live inside us, disguised as memories, rumors, labels, and lies spoken by people who never knew us. Heather Williams has worn all of them. This portrait doesn't hide the words the world threw at her. It confronts them and takes back their power.

Heather discovered her love for food as a little girl standing on a chair in her grandmother's kitchen in New Jersey. Sunday dinner was sacred: family, laughter, and tradition. At 16 she moved to Easton, PA, and later graduated from Le Cordon Bleu in Pittsburgh. Her first big kitchen job was at the Borgata in Atlantic City, where she learned the intense pace of high-volume service and the dark side of this industry.

"I was 19 working in casinos, being served alcohol underage, and no one cared. Drinking was part of the lifestyle. It didn't take long before it took over." Work. Drink. Sleep. Repeat. Blackouts became normal until November 2010, when everything changed. She found out she was 13 weeks pregnant.

"I panicked. I cried. I thought, did I already hurt my baby? Logan saved my life without even being born yet. I promised him no more blackouts. No more chaos."

Sobriety gave Heather clarity, but it didn't shield her from what came next. As a woman in the culinary world, she faced harassment, discrimination, and violence in multiple kitchens. She was grabbed, dismissed, screamed at, and told men wouldn't listen to a woman in charge.

"They underestimated me. They tried to break me. They didn't."

She went on to compete not once but twice on Hell's Kitchen, pushing through Gordon Ramsay's brutal kitchens and national television pressure. But with exposure came hate—online bullying, judgment from strangers, and brutal messages still sent to her today. The very same words written on her face in this photograph. But this is not a story about pain. This is a story about resilience.

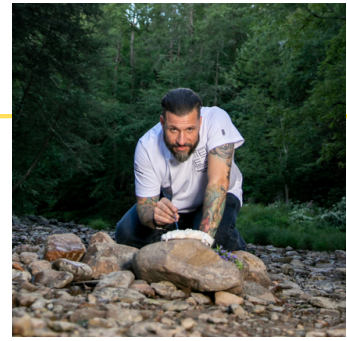
Heather now runs Rustic Creations by Heather Williams, building a business on her own terms with craft, honesty, and heart. She speaks openly about addiction, harassment, and mental health, not for sympathy but for change.

"I am not who they said I was. I'm who I fought to become."

# DUSTIN SELVAGGIO

## Meez Konzeptz

*Chef • Culinary Strategist • Innovator • Educator*



Some chefs learn technique. Others learn instinct. Dustin Selvaggio learned both, but long before professional kitchens and culinary labs, he learned respect.

Respect for ingredients.

Respect for land.

Respect for time.

His story began in his nonno's backyard garden and his nonna's kitchen, where food wasn't measured—it was felt. Survival, tradition, and discipline formed the foundation.

With more than 30 years in the industry, Dustin has cooked around the world, constantly pushing himself to understand not just how to cook, but why. He became fascinated by the science of flavor, studying the chemistry and physics behind food. He mastered classical French technique and then deconstructed it, rebuilding it through modern experimentation: liquid nitrogen, hydrocolloids, precision fermentation, and sensory mapping. He never chose between old and new; he blended them.

"I'm a walking contradiction," he says. "I understand culinary technology, but I'm drawn to the oldest methods on Earth—fermentation, preservation, wood fire. I can run a food lab and still cook over embers."

In 2013, he opened 187 Rue Principale, a destination for intentional cuisine that is modern, minimal, and deeply rooted in ingredient truth. But his evolution didn't stop in the kitchen. It expanded. He founded Meez Konzeptz, a global culinary strategy and media agency. Today, he collaborates with world-class chefs, forward-thinking brands, and leading food equipment manufacturers on product development, sensory applications, sustainability, and chef-driven innovation. Meez doesn't just advise culinary talent; it develops and manages some of the best.

In an industry often fueled by ego and burnout, Dustin chose purpose. He builds systems that work. He innovates with intention. He teaches craft, wisdom, restraint, and resilience.

"Tools change. Fire doesn't. Flavor doesn't. Skill doesn't. My job is to protect what matters and let the rest evolve."

Behind every collaboration, every project, and every flame is what matters most.

"My greatest accomplishment isn't anything I've cooked. It's my family. My wife, Rose. My kids—Dante, Brielle, Aurora—and Luna, our wild pup. Everything I build is for them."

The apron doesn't define Dustin. It's just one instrument of his craft. He is modern and ancient. Fire and science. Innovation and instinct.

And he's just getting started.

# MIKE PICHETTO

## 3rd + Ferry

Chef • Owner • Builder of Chaos and Community



All Mike ever wanted was to cook. The rest — the business ownership, the real estate, the endless stream of fires to put out — came with the territory. His story began humbly, as a teenager bussing tables and washing dishes before rising through the ranks of the Marriott kitchens. There, he learned not just recipes but resilience. He learned what it meant to show up every day, no matter how long the hours or how high the heat.

After more than a decade in corporate kitchens, Mike and his wife Rebecca took a leap and opened Vintage Restaurant & Bar at Morgan Hill, followed by Thyme Restaurant in NJ, and eventually, their beloved **3rd & Ferry Fish Market** in Easton. What started as a dream of cooking for others became a life of building — a restaurant, a reputation, a family, and a community. Together, they've spent over 20 years creating spaces where people gather, celebrate, and feel at home.

These days, Mike juggles far more than menus: staff, guests, kids, rental units, and a city that never stops moving. His life runs like one continuous service. Some days it feels like standing inside a Rube Goldberg machine of obligations, a perfectly choreographed madness where every moving part depends on him. But through the chaos, Mike finds humor, heart, and perspective.

“Sometimes I think, how did I get here?”

All I wanted to do was cook. And then I take a breath and start climbing.”

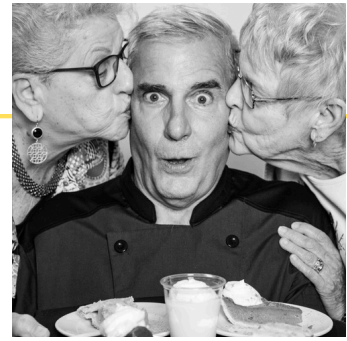
He's learned that leadership isn't quiet or perfect. It's messy, loud, and full of love. It's about laughing through the mayhem, finding balance where there is none, and choosing gratitude over exhaustion. His kitchen is proof that purpose can be found in the noise, that family and food can thrive together, and that passion, when shared, becomes community.

For Mike, the fire doesn't burn him out. It fuels him. It's a reminder that the very thing that tests you can also keep you alive.

# KUNO STADELMANN

## **Traditions of Hanover**

*Executive Chef • Mentor • Legacy of Care*



Some people choose this industry. Others are shaped by it.  
Kuno Stadelmann is both.

Born and raised in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Kuno started cooking at 15 and never stopped. His father was a chef, and together they worked side by side at the historic Hotel Bethlehem and Saucon Valley Country Club back when Bethlehem Steel still defined the town. Those early years taught him what textbooks never could—discipline, pride, and respect for the craft.

He didn't chase celebrity status. He built something harder: consistency. He worked his way up, mastered fundamentals, and became known for food that wasn't complicated, but deeply intentional. Then in 2005, he stepped into the role that would define his life - he opened the kitchen at Traditions of Hanover Senior Living.

### **Here, he found purpose.**

Kuno doesn't just cook for a dining room, he cooks for stories. He listens to the residents, hears the memories behind their favorite meals, and brings them back to life through flavor. A Bavarian dish from someone's childhood. A Sunday meal a grandmother once prepared. Recipes lost to time, until he resurrects them.

"Food connects people to who they are. That's why it matters."

He left only once, when his mother became ill. Family has always come first. In 2022, he returned to Traditions of Hanover as Executive Chef, coming home to the kitchen, and the people, who made him feel valued. After facing health challenges of his own, it was his team and his residents who helped him heal. They needed him, and he needed them.

Now, decades into his career, he still shows up with a smile and energy that fills the room. He trains younger cooks with patience. He honors the old-school kitchen values. He believes presentation is the first bite, and that roasted meats, especially prime rib, are proof that simple food done right is unbeatable.

His work isn't loud. It isn't ego-driven. It isn't about being famous.

It's about service, tradition, and heart, one plate at a time.

Kuno doesn't just feed people. He gives them back a piece of themselves.

# DEVON HALL

## Blue Ridge Eating Disorder Center

*Chef • Mentor • Cooking With Purpose*



Some masks aren't worn on the face. Some are built slowly over time—layer by layer—shaped by expectation, pressure, doubt, and the need to keep going when everything inside you screams to stop. For Chef Devon Hall, the mask he wore wasn't meant to deceive others. It was built to survive.

Devon was born and raised in Bethlehem, Pa. He earned dual degrees from Johnson & Wales University in Food Service Management and Culinary Arts, and his career with Delaware North sent him across the country—from the Grand Canyon to major stadiums and casinos—leading culinary operations and developing menus that brought plants, color, and earth to the center of the plate. But long before he learned to feed others, he had to learn how to face himself.

Devon grew up with depression before he had the words to name it. Confidence was something other people had. He didn't fit in easily and carried years of quiet isolation. Food became his refuge—a craft that demanded his hands and muted his thoughts. But as he got deeper into the industry, the very thing he loved also became the thing he hid behind.

He buried himself in responsibility. He became a leader, a resident assistant, a mentor, a student, a supervisor. He worked harder. He pushed further. He became everything to everyone except himself.

Behind the mask: exhaustion. Doubt. Pressure. The constant need to prove he belonged. The fear of disappointing others. The belief that rest was weakness.

Behind the mask: a man who forgot how to give himself grace.

His turning point didn't come crashing down in a dramatic moment. It came as a quiet ache—the realization that he was losing himself inside his own life. Something had to change. He no longer wanted to just function. He wanted to feel again. To reconnect to why he chose this life in the first place.

He found his way back through compassionate cooking—using food not as a mask, but as medicine. Today, Devon works as a chef at the Blue Ridge Eating Disorder Center, where food isn't transactional; it's emotional. It's trust. It's therapy. It's healing.

Through this work, he learned that nourishment is more than fuel. It carries hope.

His family became his anchor. They didn't need the mask. They needed him.

And for the first time in his life, that became enough.

The mask isn't gone—he's still learning to peel it back. Still learning to speak to himself with kindness. Still learning to breathe. And in his quiet moments, when he bows his head over a plate, holding a rosary passed down through generations, he remembers:

Food has never been about perfection. It has always been about love.

# AMANDA COX

**FED Hospitality Group | Foxi Ice Cream**

*Chef • Fire Cook • Mental Health Advocate*



Some journeys don't begin with a plan. They begin with a spark. For Chef Amanda Cox, that spark was food. A Hunterdon County, NJ native and graduate of The Culinary Institute of America, she planted her roots in Easton in 2012 as part of the opening team at Maxim's 22. By 26, she became the youngest female Executive Chef in the Lehigh Valley, earning a reputation for bold flavors, fearless leadership, and passion driven by instinct.

She competed in farmers markets, pig roasts, and festivals across Easton, and cooked as an honorary guest at Quebec Bacon Fest in 2016. Her journey led her to a deep connection with live-fire cooking, where she now thrives with FED Hospitality Group, a place where instinct meets heat and hard work.

But behind the apron, Amanda carried battles most people never saw. The pressure of leading kitchens at a young age, the expectations of a male-dominated industry, and the constant demand to perform began to wear her down. Beneath the pace and adrenaline of the kitchen, she struggled with anxiety, ADHD, and depression in silence.

"You can be running a kitchen and breaking boundaries and still feel like you're falling apart inside."

To cope, she leaned on quiet escapes—weed, wine, whatever numbed the overthinking and pressure. It wasn't chaos. It was survival. Until one day, she got tired of pretending she was okay.

"I was sick of being sick. Sick of surviving instead of living."

So she stepped away. She left the executive chef grind, relocated, and gave herself permission to heal. She began therapy, opened up to people she trusted, and found support instead of judgment. She learned she didn't need to act tough to earn respect. She needed to be honest.

"You can't heal in the same place that made you sick. Leaving saved me."

Today, Amanda still lives with anxiety and depression, but now she faces both with self-awareness and strength. She speaks openly about mental health in the culinary world because no chef should feel alone in their struggle.

She is still creating, still building, still pushing boundaries. Through her passion project, Foxi Ice Cream, she now brings joy to people with her unapologetically wild ice cream tacos and custom small-batch flavors that mirror her personality—bold, unexpected, and unforgettable.

Amanda lives in Belvidere, NJ, where she spoils her boyfriend and stepchildren with wood-fired meals, laughter, and endless ice cream experiments. She is proof that stepping away is not quitting. It is choosing yourself.

"I'm still here. Still cooking. Still becoming. And I'm not done yet."

# ANDREA MORETTI

## The Mellow Kitchen

*Private Chef • Traveler • Culinary Storyteller*



A chef doesn't just cook food – a chef carries stories. For Andrea Moretti, those stories began in Rome, where he was born, and continued across borders and cultures as he moved throughout Europe. His earliest memories are filled with the warmth of home cooking, simple ingredients, and Italian soul. His foundation was built in family kitchens, not classrooms – long before he ever stepped into culinary school.

Travel became his greatest teacher. From the Mediterranean coast to the markets of Northern Europe, every journey left a flavor behind. Andrea learned to appreciate food as a cultural bridge – a way to understand people, places, and tradition. After culinary training, he began working in restaurants in the Lehigh Valley, but his path took a bold turn when he moved back overseas and spent nearly a decade owning and operating a fresh egg pasta factory and catering company in Northern Europe.

It was there he learned the realities of the culinary life – the long hours, the solitude inside relentless work, and the mental battles chefs rarely speak about. The pressure to perform, to succeed, to constantly produce perfection takes a toll. Andrea pushed through it the only way he knew how – with discipline, creativity, and heart – but he eventually understood something deeper: food alone isn't enough to keep a person whole. You must also protect your peace.

He returned to the United States with a new philosophy and founded The Mellow Kitchen – not just a business, but a belief. Cooking doesn't have to be chaos. Food can be personal. Service can be intimate. Meals can bring back calm, connection, and meaning.

Today, Andrea is a private chef and culinary storyteller, crafting unforgettable dining experiences for clients, families, and events throughout the Lehigh Valley. His food is rooted in his Italian heritage, yet influenced by every stop in his life – Mediterranean soul, Middle Eastern depth, European farmhouse tradition, and now, an unexpected love for Cajun heat and Modern American boldness.

He doesn't chase trends. He chases authenticity. He believes technique means nothing without heart – and that food is only complete when it makes someone feel something.

As a chef, Andrea still works through the weight that comes with the craft – the pressure, the expectations – but he now carries it with purpose rather than chaos. He keeps learning. Keeps evolving. Keeps cooking from a place of truth.

Because to him, success isn't fame. It's fulfillment.

“Let's focus on the journey, not just the destination.”

# AMANDA PIETROBONO

## Kellyn Foundation

*Culinary Medicine • Community Impact • Heart, Hustle, Health*



Amanda's relationship with food began as creativity. A way to explore. A way to feel connected. But like many people in the culinary world, it also became complicated. Food carried pressure. Expectations. Identity. In a culture obsessed with perfection, she found herself chasing it. Perfect plates. Perfect standards. Perfect outcomes. And like so many chefs, she learned that perfection comes with a cost.

At The Culinary Institute of America, she fell in love with the craft of cooking. The precision. The science. The discipline. She earned three degrees and pushed hard through kitchens that demanded excellence. But behind the performance, she began to question everything. What is the cost of success if it disconnects you from yourself? Why are chefs willing to sacrifice their health in the name of good food? What do we lose when food becomes pressure instead of nourishment?

Those questions changed her life.

Amanda chose a new path. One that honored both flavor and well-being. She became part of the Kellyn Foundation, where she now serves as Director of Operations and Culinary Medicine, helping communities gain access to real food that heals. She teaches families how to cook meals that taste good and feel good. She builds programs that make healthy eating realistic and affordable. She partners with physicians, schools, and farmers to bring change that lasts.

For Amanda, food is not a trend. It is a tool. It brings people to the table. It restores health. It builds confidence. It connects communities. And most importantly, it gives people control of their future.

Her commitment to purpose deepened when she became a mother. Life took on a new kind of intensity. Meetings now share space with meals on the high chair and sticky fingerprints on her chef coat. Her days are layered with mission and motherhood. She moves between food systems and bedtime stories. Emails and lullabies. Community change and teething toys. It is chaotic at times. It is sacred always.

Motherhood did not pull her away from her purpose. It expanded it. Now every project, every class, every recipe is fueled by a personal mission. She wants her children to grow up in a world where health is not confusing, where real food is normal, and where wellness feels joyful instead of heavy. She wants them to see that passion and compassion can live in the same career. She wants them to know that strength has seasons and that purpose is not found. It is built.

Amanda Pietrobono is not trying to impress anyone. She is trying to move something forward. She is proving that a chef can stand at the intersection of food, health, and humanity. She is proving that change does not come from talking about problems. It comes from teaching solutions. It comes from standing in the kitchen and showing people what is possible.

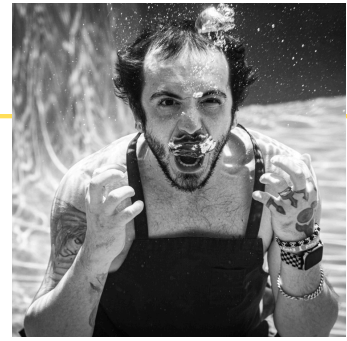
Not with perfection.

With purpose.

# ZACKARY BUSCH

## The Club at Twin Lakes

*Courage • Recovery • Purpose*



Some chefs learn to move through pressure. Others are forged in it. For Zackary Busch, the fire didn't scare him – it felt familiar. Chaos made sense to him. He grew up inside it.

Zack was introduced to kitchen life early. His father, Chef Jeffrey Busch, has been in the industry for over 40 years. Zack got his first job as a dishwasher and prep cook at The Widow's Tavern & Grille, watching chefs move at a speed and intensity that felt electric. The adrenaline, the noise, the nonstop energy – he didn't just want to be part of it. He needed it. He chose the kitchen, and the kitchen chose him back.

But while he found his passion young, he also carried something heavier – something silent. From childhood, Zack battled depression, isolation, and a storm of thoughts he didn't know how to control. Growing up wasn't easy. A sick mother. Financial strain. An absent father who was working himself to exhaustion in the industry Zack would inherit. Love was there – but so was survival.

When cooking became his world, it also became his escape. Work hard, move fast, ignore the noise inside.

The pressure, perfectionism, late nights, and emotional disconnect built up. Zack began self-medicating to keep going. On the surface, he looked sharp – talented, respected, high-functioning. But inside, he was sinking. Addiction doesn't always look like losing control; sometimes it looks like showing up to work, putting on the apron, and falling apart one shift at a time.

The deeper he pushed into his craft, the more he lost pieces of himself. Depression pulled him down. The weight of responsibility, both personal and professional, dragged him under. He reached a point where breathing felt like labor. He was underwater in his own life – drowning but still cooking.

Then came the quiet realization: he wanted to live.

He fought his way back. He didn't just fight for sobriety – he fought for identity. Discipline returned. Purpose sharpened. And in the middle of it all, he found hope in the same place that nearly broke him – the kitchen.

Because despite everything, Zack loves to cook. He loves to lead. He loves watching young cooks ignite with passion. He loves giving guests memories. He loves giving his crew a reason to stay in the fight.

"This industry will take everything from you if you let it. But it can also save you – if you give it something meaningful back."

Today, Chef Zack Busch stands not as someone who escaped darkness, but as someone who keeps walking through it and refuses to quit.

The apron didn't hide him. It revealed him.

He is living proof that you can sink – and still come up for air.

# JASON SIZEMORE

## Butterhead Kitchen

*Chef • Educator • Purpose Through Compassion*



Some chefs shout their message. Jason Sizemore lives his quietly.

Before he ever stepped into a kitchen professionally, Jason spent 21 years as a teacher and school administrator in Pennsylvania and New York City. He taught students, led schools, built programs, and believed in something simple but powerful: connection changes people. He didn't know it then, but that same belief would follow him into food.

Cooking started as a side passion—something he did to bring people together. That passion grew, evolved, and eventually became Butterhead Kitchen—his plant-based culinary business built not on judgment, but invitation. Jason doesn't believe in shouting about food. He believes in sharing it.

He now hosts plant-based cooking classes, private dinners, community and corporate demos, and produces small-batch vegan meats and cheeses. But to him, the menu is just the entry point. The real work happens in conversation—when guests rethink what they eat, why they eat it, and who it affects.

*"My goal isn't to turn people vegan. My goal is to get people thinking."*

Jason doesn't believe in heavy-handed messaging. Instead, he teaches curiosity. He encourages people to pause at the plate—to consider ingredients, impact, and intention. His kitchen is a place where people laugh, learn, taste boldly, and leave changed—not because they were told to, but because they felt something.

That message drives the image he created for this project. In a field surrounded by animals—pigs, chickens, and a sheep—Jason lays out a table full of vibrant food. Not one piece of it came from suffering. At Butterhead Kitchen, animals aren't ingredients. They are guests.

The photo also carries something deeply personal. Jason is wearing his father's shirt—a quiet tribute woven into the fabric of his story. His father passed away unexpectedly more than a decade ago, a loss that shook his world and changed his life.

Grief didn't break him—it redirected him.

Losing his father reminded him that life is short and purpose matters. So he changed path. He left traditional education and chose a new way to teach: through food, empathy, and community. He rebuilt with love—alongside his husband, William, and their rescue dog Alfie, the namesake of Butterhead Kitchen. Like everything he does, the shift wasn't loud. It was intentional.

He believes food should build—not divide. Heal—not harm. Inspire—not intimidate.

Butterhead Kitchen isn't just a business.

It's a mindset. A movement. A better way of feeding people—and the world.

# AMAN'S

## Aman's Artisan Indian Cuisine

Family. Flavor. Fire.



Led by the Bansal family – *Baljeet, Amandeep, Sukhjeet, Gagandeep, and Jasmeet* – Aman's is more than a restaurant. It's a living, breathing celebration of food, family, and all the emotions that come with it.

Their story begins in Kenya, where their parents, Baldev and Amarjeet, built a home filled with warmth, resilience, and flavor. Food was never just sustenance – it was love on a plate, shared at the table no matter what life threw their way. When the family immigrated to the United States, those same values became their compass.

Years later, Aman's was born – a modern Punjabi dining experience rooted in tradition, where every dish carries a memory, and every spice tells a story. Jasmeet, the youngest brother, leads the kitchen with instinct and innovation, guided by his family's collective palate and passion.

But behind the laughter, the perfection, and the polished plates lies the reality of family in business – the long nights, the heated moments, the pressure to get it right every single time.

These images capture that duality – the joy and exhaustion, humor and heart, chaos and connection – that define life behind the apron.

At Aman's, family is both the recipe and the result.

The love is real. The food is real.

The emotions? All of them – raw, beautiful, and completely true.

# JEFF RUSH

## Home Chef

*Private Chef • Veteran of Service • Healing Through Food*



Jeff Rush was born and raised in West Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in a family where meals were more than nourishment—they were memory. On his father’s side: PA Dutch and coal region classics, chicken pot pie with homemade noodles, corn pie, pig stomach, fruit pies with lard crusts. On his mother’s side: Italian Sunday dinners, simmering red sauce with pork neck bones, basil plucked from outside the kitchen door, hand-rolled meatballs, and salads dressed with olive oil, garlic, and lemon. Food in his world came with stories, history, and love.

He didn’t become a chef first, he became a protector. After graduating from Liberty High School and Edinboro University, he entered law enforcement, later attending the Allentown Police Academy. He wanted to serve. He wanted to make a difference. But service came with scars. PTSD doesn’t announce itself, it creeps in silently. Long after the shift ends, it follows you home.

Jeff didn’t recognize the weight at first, only the symptoms. Restless mind. Broken sleep. Quick anger. Moments of numbness. He couldn’t turn off what he’d seen. But on his days off, he found something that pulled him back to himself, cooking. He cooked from dawn to dusk, filling his kitchen with the familiar comfort of family recipes and new creations. When nothing else made sense, cooking did.

“I couldn’t always explain what I was feeling—but I could cook. Cooking gave me purpose when my head was too loud to hear anything else.”

It took years to accept the truth; he was living with PTSD. It affected everything, his ability to connect, to trust, to be fully present. But cooking was the bridge back. Plate by plate, he found healing not through therapy alone—but through service of another kind: feeding others.

He later transitioned to public education and coaching football, another chapter of giving back. But the kitchen stayed close. It waited patiently for him—as if it always knew he’d return.

Today, Jeff doesn’t run a restaurant—and he doesn’t want to. He brings people together through intimate in-home dining experiences, where strangers become friends over handmade dishes and shared stories. He doesn’t just cook—he teaches, he listens, he connects. No rush, no ego, no screaming tickets. Just food the way it was always meant to be—personal.

Always beside him is Rufus, his Presa Canario and support dog. Rufus isn’t just a pet—he’s part of the journey. Loyal through the worst days. Steady through the storms. Jeff even cooks elevated meals for him—raw proteins, vegetables, radishes, Persian cucumbers, local honey—because in his world, love is expressed through food.

Jeff doesn’t measure success in stars, awards, or restaurants. He measures it in peace—and the ability to stand exactly where he is today, still moving forward.

He is proof that life can break you and you can still rebuild.

Purpose isn’t found. It’s made—one plate at a time.

# JOSH PALMER

**Owner & Executive Chef, Sette Luna**

Roots. Resilience. Reverence.



For Josh Palmer, food has always been about connection – to family, to land, and to legacy. Born and raised in Williams Township, just south of Easton, Josh grew up surrounded by the rhythms of hunters and farmers – the Palmer and Kish families – where every meal told a story of hard work and gratitude.

As a kid, he found peace in the woods. Hunting taught him patience and precision; nature taught him humility. By twelve, he had butchered his first deer and saved enough squirrels to make a pie.

“I learned early,” he says, “if you’re going to take from the earth, respect it enough to use every part.”

After leaving Colby College, Josh shoveled manure on a dairy farm by day and volunteered in kitchens by night, determined to earn his way back to the craft he loved. Apprenticing under Monique Gaumont-Lanvin and John Atkin at the Sign of the Sorrel Horse, he absorbed the discipline, artistry, and relentless pace of fine dining – lessons that would guide him through every kitchen that followed.

From Penn State’s Hospitality program to managing renowned restaurants across the country, his journey eventually led him home to Easton, where Sette Luna was born twenty years ago. It became more than a restaurant – it became his mark, his aim, his legacy.

Today, whether he’s behind the line or behind a bow, Josh approaches both with the same steady focus – honoring where he came from while always aiming for something greater. “Cooking is how I show love,” he says. “It’s how I give back. Watching that first bite hit someone – that joy – that’s everything.”

# EMILY FISCHER

## Limeport Inn

*Chef • Mother • Legacy in Motion*



Emily Fischer was built on work. Long before the kitchens, long before the title, she learned responsibility on her family's 60-acre horse farm in Limeport, Pennsylvania. Horses don't wait until you're ready—no sick days, no shortcuts. That discipline became the backbone of her life and her career.

Food wasn't a trend in her world. It was home. It was pot roast drifting through the doorway before she dropped her backpack. NPR in the background. Her grandmother's chicken and dumplings. Tomato pie so thick your teeth left prints. Food meant comfort, connection, memory—long before it ever meant service tickets or payroll.

When her family purchased and restored The Limeport Inn in 2001, Emily was six years old—small enough to stand on a milk crate and watch the line move. She wasn't handed a career. She chose it. And she earned it. Station by station. Burn by burn. Service by service. She refused to be "the owner's daughter." She wanted to be undeniable.

She built her culinary identity the hard way—through repetition, obsession and miles of prep lists. Trained at Northampton Community College, she explored modernist trends but found her voice in comfort with edge: food rooted in tradition, sharpened with technique, finished with emotion. Food that means something.

Kitchen life shaped her, but life outside the kitchen changed her.

Motherhood didn't arrive gently. Severe preeclampsia put her on hospital bed rest. Her daughter, Iris, was born at just one pound and spent three months in the NICU. Emily wrote menus from a hospital bed because that is what this life demands: you find a way. You keep going. You don't quit. When she brought Iris home, she made another hard choice—she left a relationship that no longer reflected the life she wanted for her daughter. She chose peace over comfort. Strength over familiarity. Self-respect over fear. Today, she is a single mother and working chef, balancing overnight prep with bedtime stories, plating specials with a baby on her hip, passing Iris to the front-of-house mid-service when needed. It isn't easy—but she does it anyway.

The kitchen taught her toughness. Motherhood taught her power.

Being a woman in this industry still means fighting assumptions. Delivery drivers call her "sweetheart." Sales reps ask for "the chef" and look past her. Too warm and she's dismissed. Too firm and she's labeled. So she stopped caring about labels altogether.

She doesn't need to be called "Chef" to lead. She leads by example.

Now, she is building something bigger than plates—a legacy. A life Iris can watch and say: strength is built, not gifted. Emily doesn't want fame. She wants ownership—in business, in craft, and in life. Her future is not a wish; it's a blueprint.

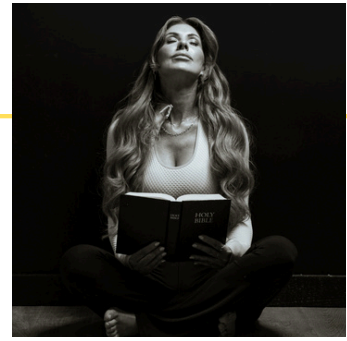
She comes from a long line of women who don't fold.

And she's raising the next one.

# REBEKAH DOYLE

## Café 23

Faith. Purpose. Legacy.



Some journeys are chosen. Others are called.

Rebekah Doyle's story is both.

Her love for cooking began at twelve years old when she started creating meals that reflected her own convictions about food, even when they differed from her family's. She grew up surrounded by the flavors and traditions of her Italian heritage, where meals were big, loud, handmade, and full of love. Food became her language long before she knew she would one day build a life around it.

But Rebekah's story is not just a story about food. It is a story about faith.

She believes God placed a dream on her heart at a young age. For years that dream waited quietly while she walked through life, marriage, and motherhood. It came into focus through the hardest season of her life.

Rebekah's husband was diagnosed with a life-changing illness that eventually left him disabled. Most people would have stopped chasing their dreams at that point. He moved toward his with even greater courage. His determination inspired her. His resilience shaped her. His belief in purpose taught her what faith in action looks like. Before his life was cut short by illness, he pushed forward with everything he had and showed his family what strength really is.

His life became the foundation for hers.

After losing him, Rebekah faced a crossroads. She could live in grief or build from it. For her three children. For the dream God placed on her heart. For the legacy of the man who inspired her. So she chose to build. Out of that calling came Café 23.

The name is not a brand. It is a prayer. Inspired by Psalm 23, the scripture that carried her through loss and into purpose. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. Even in the valley, I will fear no evil. God remained faithful, and Rebekah chose to honor that by building something that serves others.

Café 23 is more than a place to eat. It is personal. It was created so people could gather in a space that feels like home. A place where breakfast is made with real love. A place where coffee is served with warmth. A place where people with dietary restrictions can finally sit at the table without worry. A place built on faith and intention. Every detail reflects her heart. Every recipe carries meaning. Every plate is a reminder that purpose can grow out of pain.

Rebekah brings strength into her kitchen. Not loud strength. Quiet strength. Faith-driven strength. The kind you earn from surviving what should have broken you. The kind you carry when you know why you are here.

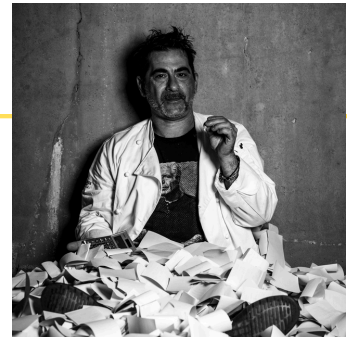
Her work is not just about creating food. It is about building community. It is about honoring her husband. It is about raising her children to know that even through grief, God provides a way forward. It is about serving people with dignity and love.

Her life is proof of a simple truth. Hope is not given. Hope is chosen.

# ANTHONY DISTEFANO

**Executive Chef, Bear Creek Mountain Resort**

Vision. Grit. Reflection.



With over three decades in the hospitality industry, Anthony DiStefano brings a lifetime of experience – and heart – to his role as Executive Chef at Bear Creek Mountain Resort. He believes that culture is the most vital ingredient in the food and beverage world, shaping every dish, every plate, and every team dynamic.

But this photo? It's not about polish. It's about truth.

Surrounded by a storm of order slips and ideas, Anthony embodies the chaos and beauty of a chef's mind – the endless pursuit of balance between creativity, exhaustion, and inspiration. "A posed headshot? No thanks," he says. "I'd rather show what it really feels like. The mess. The emotion. The heart of it all."

After thirty years in the industry, he knows that burnout is real – and so is resilience. Like Anthony Bourdain once said, "If anything is good for pounding humility into you permanently, it's the restaurant business." Anthony carries that humility into every shift, every service, every quiet moment after the kitchen lights go out.

When he's not leading his team, you'll find him outdoors – hiking, fishing, or hunting – or unwinding with art, music, and his beloved Hot Wheels collection. His favorite meal is roasted capon, and his favorite song might just be blasting from Jane's Addiction. He's a Philly sports loyalist, a fan of *Transformers 1* and *Land Man*, and most proudly, a father – his greatest accomplishment of all.

"I love my job," he says simply. "Skills can be taught. Character, you either have or you don't."

For Anthony, cooking isn't about perfection. It's about perseverance. It's about showing up every day with humor, humility, and a fire that never quite goes out. In the end, his story is proof that even in the chaos, there's still beauty – and still heart behind the apron.

# CHRIS FERAUDO

## The Glasbern Inn

Artist. Chef. Truth-teller.



For Chef Chris Feraudo, food has never just been about flavor. It's a medium — his art form, his language, and sometimes, his therapy. As Executive Chef at Glasbern Inn, Chris blends precision and emotion, crafting dishes that connect people to both nature and truth. His work sits at the intersection of art and survival — raw, honest, and deeply human.

The image he created for Behind the Apron is intentionally jarring: cutting lines of salt instead of cocaine, “smoking” a squash instead of drugs. It's dark humor layered with realism — a commentary on the hidden addictions within the culinary world. “In our industry,” he says, “burnout and obsession are the quiet addictions. It's not always drugs or alcohol — sometimes it's perfection, or the fear of not being enough.”

For Chris, this photo is more than a statement. It's reclamation. By turning those shadows into art, he's rewriting his own narrative — one where creativity becomes the cure instead of the escape. Through his cooking, he offers something deeper than a meal: a moment of connection, a reminder that behind every plate and every person is a story worth tasting.

# JACOB WATSON

## Grille 3501

*Chef • Craftsman • Reformed Fire*



Jacob Watson grew up in Texas, surrounded by hard work, long days, and real food. His family worked in the cattle industry, his father worked in food service, and Jacob got his first job as a dishwasher in a small family restaurant. The kitchen didn't intimidate him — it made sense to him. It moved at his rhythm. It demanded everything, and he liked that.

He tried leaving once, enrolling in college for computer science, but he couldn't fight who he was. He didn't belong behind a desk. He belonged behind a line. In 2017, he landed at Bolete in Fountain Hill, training under Chef Lee Chizmar, where he learned refinement, patience, and the commitment to do things from scratch. From there, he joined Zahav in Philadelphia — one of the most celebrated restaurants in the country. The pressure was extreme, the pace unforgiving, and the expectations relentless. And Jacob kept climbing.

But something else climbed with him — anger.

He became what this industry quietly accepts: the angry chef. Short fuse. Sharp tone. Controlled chaos that sometimes snapped out of control. He cared deeply about the work, about standards, about doing things right — but somewhere in that obsession, he began losing pieces of himself. The cracked mirror in his portrait isn't about violence. It's about truth.

"I see two versions of myself — who I was, and who I refuse to be again."

The pandemic changed him. Time away from the noise made space for something kitchens rarely give: reflection. He didn't like everything he saw. So he did the hardest work a chef can do — he began changing himself without losing his fire.

Now, as chef at Grille 3501, Jacob leads differently. He still pushes for excellence. Still believes in discipline. Still runs a tight kitchen. But he chooses to build people instead of breaking them. He cares about growth — his and his team's — and works to prove that leadership doesn't require rage, only resolve.

The mirror may be cracked, but it isn't broken. It's honest.

And so is he.

# KYLE ABEL

**Chef de Cuisine | Edge Restaurant**

Resilience. Redemption. Renewal.



For Kyle, cooking has always been more than a job – it’s been his way of moving through life’s currents. From his early days cooking alongside his mom and watching Good Eats, to running kitchens across the country, Kyle has spent his career learning to balance control and chaos, flavor and feeling, fire and flow.

After earning his degree from the Pennsylvania College of Technology, he cooked everywhere from Arizona’s Pig & Pickle to San Diego’s Crown Landing and North Carolina’s Red Stag Grill, mastering his craft with every move. At Florida’s historic Casa Monica Resort, he finally found his rhythm – until the weight of the hours, pressure, and perfectionism began to pull him under.

When his younger brother, Nate, passed away unexpectedly, that rhythm stopped. Grief and addiction took hold. “I was functioning,” Kyle admits, “but barely.” Surrounded by loss and uncertainty, he left Florida and returned home to Bethlehem – unsure if he’d ever find peace in a kitchen again.

But life, like water, keeps moving. Kyle found his way back through Edge Restaurant – a place that became his anchor, his home, and his healing ground. Surrounded by a team that showed him compassion instead of judgment, he rediscovered the joy that first drew him to food. “Edge has been with me through the good and the bad,” he says.

Now, 11 months sober, Kyle stands steady in the flow. The bottles, the pain, the memories – they’re all still there, but they no longer control him. His story, captured in his portrait, is about what it means to keep moving even when the weight of the past surrounds you.

Through sobriety, love, and renewed purpose, Kyle has found beauty in the current – a reminder that even in life’s deepest waters, there’s always a way forward.