

## Idaho's Bounty Special Feature

# Chef Vern and St.Al's Hospital in Boise

November 25, 2009

As Idaho's Bounty grows, so has our reach into the realm of wholesale. We have been actively courting restaurants, hospitals and other institutions in hopes of distributing more local food. Chef Vern has been an instrumental partner in these early stages of our wholesale ventures.

Meet Chef Vern, Executive Chef at Saint Alphonsus RMC with Thomas Cuisine Management, and learn more about how he is supporting Idaho's Bounty, local food, and sustainable farming practices.

### In his words....

#### INTRODUCTIONS TO THE CO-OP

I was invited to the Farmer Chef's Collaborative and met some fantastic people that guided me to look into using this time saving, stream line ordering system through a place called Idaho's Bounty. I met this charismatic, passionate Zen-like man, James Reed and sought to become a part of his movement towards 'going Idaho'.

#### VERN'S BACKGROUND

In my early years I started in High School cooking in a vocational setting and feeding the faculty while honing my skills as a dishwasher/prep cook. I was accepted to the Culinary Institute of America and put my nose in every book, video and volunteer effort that I could to get the most out of school. I went back to my roots at graduation and ran the Hilton Hotel I started in as a kid.

A few years and numerous chance meetings with Thomas Cuisine Management later, I was offered the chance to open the largest account for TCM -the flagship, Saint Alphonsus RMC. The last eight years here at SARMC have gone by in a blink it seems.

#### GETTING INVOLVED

Our company looks to be the leader in all areas of the businesses they service. Our scratch based philosophy lends itself perfectly to using locally sourced ingredients. Every account uses potatoes, tomatoes and onions - so it was a really easy sell. The terms 'sustainable', 'going green' and 'brand re-sourcing' are not new to our clients - in fact they're catch phrases found by every water cooler.

Organizations are realizing that this is not just a buzz word for 2009 but a genuine change in the approach to the way we conduct business as a planet. To not do anything or to turn away from the benefits of using local commerce is inviting failure - this is where the market is going - this is what our customers want - this is the right thing to do.

#### LOCAL, ORGANIC FOOD

To me the advantages of using locally sourced, organic foods are...

- Supporting local commerce and keeping Idaho dollars in Idaho. Small local farms are a valuable component of our community's character, helping maintain agricultural heritage, preserve land use diversity, and moderate development...
- Enabling the customer to sell 'source known' ingredients at the very peak of freshness. Supporting local farm production puts a "face" behind the foods we consume and keeps us connected to the seasons, as well as the unique flavor and diversity of local crops...
- Improving the health of our customers by offering natural foods and products free of the numerous chemicals used to sterilize, preserve, protect or otherwise 'modify' our food...
- Lowering our carbon footprint by being stewards of the resources entrusted to us - Why grow a potato here in Idaho, ship it to California, then ship it back to Idaho to sell to our customers?!? Buying produce from local growers reduces the environmental impact and

costs of transporting product...

- Minimizing handling and transportation costs gives farmers maximum return on their investment. Most of the money spent on local production stays in the community, "greening up" the local economy, creating jobs and opportunities.
- Burning less fossil fuels/exhaust + less handling + encouraging bio-diversity =less wasted money, reduced air pollution and minimizing the impact on the environment.

## LEADERSHIP ROLES IN LOCAL FOODS

Use it - teach it - do it. It really is that simple. I will try to encourage as many other Chef's as possible to use local products by offering myself as a beacon and guide where needed.

It does take time plus constant, tireless and diligent effort to move the 'fly wheel' forward but with the combined mind set change of a lot of people to do something - be it composting, recycling or sustainability of some kind (no matter how small) - the practice or habit of going local and becoming more sustainable will take hold more and more and become the common place in every business.

We need to teach our children the right way to live and lead by example starting right now and stop being naive when it comes to the gross realization that there are not endless resources for us to consume. Our way of finding the path of least resistance is coming to a quick halt. We need to work in harmony with the earth and respect the resources we use.

## TIPS FOR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Find your 'agents of change', that believe in this philosophy, that work at your place of business. Gather them and form a team and meet to strategize ways that your organization could do things differently. Start with small changes and develop systems that yield consistent results.

Allow no idea to be viewed as impossible - rather -an idea that is not probable and go with the ideas that are probable and can be achieved easily. Measure the success, adjust the formula and push forward.

Celebrate the win and make the outcome contagious - beginning to spawn creative thinking and heralding the movement forward as a best practice.



**Thanks Vern for your hard work in the local food movement in Southern Idaho and for your partnership with Idaho's Bounty!**

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