

Passion, Success & Giving Back

2010 Salute to Excellence winners share their stories

by Cynthia Whitney-Ward

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years ago,” remembers Fritsch, “a friend helped me out when I had surgery. When I asked her how I could repay her, she said: sometime someone will need your help; help them. I’m still fulfilling that promise.”

Mentor of the Year

Abbey Steffen
Republic Chophouse, Green Bay



Green Bay’s Republic Chophouse Executive Chef Abbey Steffen grew up in Glenwood City, WI. Her mom, she says, was her culinary inspiration. “She was a great cook and the family would sit down to dinner together every night,” says Steffen who was obsessed with reading all of her mom’s food magazines. Steffen went to UW Stout and received her degree in hotel/restaurant/tourism management and then her culinary degree at Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton. She became Executive Chef of the Republic Chophouse when it opened two years ago. “I got to design and create our commercial kitchen and all the menus,”



Pictured at the 2010 ProStart Invitational at the Wisconsin Restaurant Expo (From left) Ken Falk from U.S. Foodservice; Pulaski High School teacher Liz Moehr; Pulaski culinary team members Michael Kurowski, Tom Chartrand, Christian Guevera, Elle Anderson; and mentor Abbey Steffen.

says Steffen, who loved every minute of it. “Working in a restaurant kitchen is what I call controlled chaos. I love the creative freedom and the instant gratification.”

Steffen is the WRA Education Foundation’s Mentor of the Year. So how did this 20-something chef become such a power mentor? “Liz Moehr, a teacher from Pulaski High School came into the restaurant,” recalls Steffen. “When she found out that I was a graduate, she told me about the ProStart program she was teaching and asked me to become involved. And I did—working with four students every week for five months.”

“The Pulaski High School team won first place in the ProStart state culinary competition and came in tenth at the nationals,” says Steffen, with obvious pride. “It’s the first time the school had won this competition.” She loved the whole mentoring process, everything from helping choose the four students for the team to challenging her own skills in communication, time management and listening. “I

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really learned patience and how to be supportive and I loved their enthusiasm and how respectful they were,” says Steffen, who has kept in contact with the four students and will be working with the ProStart program again this year. “It’s important to not give up, to fight for what you want. I had to prove myself over and over again. Hard work does pay off!”



Honoring Commitment to Education

Each year, the Wisconsin Restaurant Association Education Foundation recognizes five individuals and one company as Salute to Excellence honorees for their dedication to education and commitment to moving the restaurant industry forward. They have worked in a variety of roles, in different parts of the state, but they share an enthusiasm and optimism for the future of the restaurant industry.

The Celebration of Excellence is held every fall to honor Salute to Excellence winners and present scholarships to students in Wisconsin pursuing a career in culinary arts or hospitality management. This year over \$42,000 in scholarships were awarded through the Education Foundation’s Endowment Fund.