

## “The Traveling Apprentice” Works For TurnAbout, Inc.

It’s that time of the year when Mother Nature sends a nib in the morning air, the sound of dry leaves rustling on the walkways, and a reminder to be thankful for our blessings and opportunities. It was the perfect time for me to take a Traveling Apprentice assignment in the kitchen at TurnAbout Café on Route 4 in Ownings, a café where the owner, Pam Klink feels blessed to be able to fulfill two of her passions. . .cooking, and giving back to the community by providing a “living wage” and job training for the underemployed in Calvert.

It seemed like an odd paring of passions until I realized that Pam holds an A.A. in Baking & Pastry from Baltimore Culinary College, a B.S. in Social Science from University of Maryland University College, and that she began her commitment to give back to the community while she was employed as a pastry chef in some of the most respected restaurants in Baltimore and hired ex-offenders and trained them as bakers. Presently she employees a young woman with physical disability from the Arc of Southern Maryland and developmentally disabled youth through a public school program. Both are paid \$9.50 an hour, both are learning job skills and both seemed thrilled to be working at TurnAbout.

My first assignment was to dash to Safeway to pick up some items that hadn’t materialized in the previous day’s food delivery. Before the day was over I’d bussed tables, shredded pounds of roasted chicken for chicken salad, filled the pastry display cases, carted buckets of ice to fill the ice container at the beverage station, and labored at the least-loved work station in a commercial kitchen- -the dishwashing sinks.

TurnAbout strives to promptly send delicious, high quality food out to their valued customers and serve it in a friendly and courteous manner. That dictate created a level of kitchen activity that left my head spinning.

At one time three delivery men arrived simultaneously to wheel their dollies into a kitchen area no larger than my living room, a space already occupied by two chefs, three kitchen workers and chock-a-block full with storage space, a fry station, grill station, sandwich prep station, bake prep area, walk-in refrigerator, commercial ice maker, and the sink station. In the midst all this, Pam and Rob, her Executive Chef husband who specializes in the evening dinners, continued to preside over the controlled chaos with unfrazzled equanimity and lunches flowed seamlessly out of the kitchen.

Stress can be a common factor in fast paced kitchens and I’m told the larger the establishment, the larger the staff, the larger the stress factor . . .and that it’s not uncommon for high strung culinary personalities to vent with profanity. Sad, but given that they work in an environment filled with fire, hot grease and sharp knives there are far worse alternatives to anger management. Thankfully, I apprenticed with Pam and Rob, who put personalities aside and just concentrated on cooking great food and giving back to the community.



*The Traveling Apprentice is a monthly column written by Carolyn McHugh, President/CEO of the Calvert County Chamber of Commerce. Each month Carolyn spends a day working for a Chamber member, then writes a column for a local newspaper about the experience. The article is later inserted into Chamber’s newsletter and posted on the Chamber’s web-site in order to give the maximum exposure to the Chamber member. Her commitment to Chamber members and to the readers is that she’s there for Chamber members and that whatever they do in their daily job, she’ll do too.*