

2009 Education Scholarship Winners Announced

Restaurant Association Scholarships Underpin The Value Of Investing In Staff

The financial overheads associated with studying for higher tertiary qualifications and undertaking personal professional upskilling have been made considerably lighter for a group of successful culinary and hospitality employees awarded this year's Restaurant Association Education Trust scholarships. Nine industry personnel have been chosen as scholarship recipients this year – and all have been given a clear indication that the grants they received have been made at a time when many of their colleagues are struggling in the current tough economic climate.

Restaurant Association Education Trust chairman Tony Adcock said that while this year's scholarship recipients were all worthy nominees in their own rights, the selection process had been made harder by the sheer number of applicants who were seeking financial assistance due to the impact of the credit crunch on the hospitality and foodservice sectors. "During a period of immense economic uncertainty and social turmoil, many hospitality businesses throughout New Zealand are looking at cutting back on various financial expenditures within their organisations – and training is often wrongly placed in the firing line," Mr Adcock said. "Through these scholarship grants, the Restaurant Association's commitment to training and ongoing personal career development reflects the importance that the industry's representative body places on upskilling staff, who will in turn add value to their employer's business.

"Investing in staff is one of the most visionary yet common sense decisions a business can make. For it is the motivated, committed, loyal and trained staff who will drive a business – through good times and bad. This year's recipients are particularly fortunate to have been given an amazing lift up their career ladders, when many of their peers are simply struggling to hold on to the bottom rung," Mr Adcock concluded.

Here are the nine Restaurant Association Education Trust scholarship recipients for 2009....

Continuing Education Grant, \$12,000



**Kenneth O'Connell,
Vidal Restaurant, Hastings**

New Zealand's reigning Chef of the Year, Kenneth O'Connell, will be using his Restaurant Association scholarship to study a new way of sourcing menu ingredients directly from local boutique food producers.

Later this year, chef O'Connell is travelling to Sydney to work at the 2008 Australian Restaurant of the Year – Quay Restaurant, headed up chef Peter Gilmore who works closely with local farmers and providers to grow and source ingredients and serve cutting-edge modern food.

"Nowadays food is mass produced, and a lot is imported, when the items I need can be produced within a hundred miles of my restaurant ethically and organically. For example, using farmed paua, line-caught fish from smaller fishing boats which use sustainable methods, organic vegetables, hydroponically-grown micro-salads, and greens which are delivered from a grower but are kept alive at the restaurant and cut fresh for each service".

"Peter Gilmore doesn't have much international recognition but it is only a matter of time before his concepts and thinking will push cuisine to new levels in Australia and New Zealand," added chef O'Connell. "I want to see how this process is successfully established on a larger scale, managed, and then delivered to the restaurant. I feel that modern cooking should take this route of sustainable, organic and naturally produced and cooked foods, where the natural flavours are kept and enhanced," said chef O'Connell.

"This is not a trend or a new style, but is the future of our craft as chefs. I feel that there is more to cheffing these days than taking goods from a delivery man and cooking them, as a chef should be part of, and have an influence on, the products he is using."

Originally from Ireland, chef O'Connell came to New Zealand almost two years ago. He credits his culinary influences as some of the biggest names in world cooking circles – the Roux brothers who he first looked up to

as a commis chef. Raymond Blanc – well known for his seasonal menus and sourcing ingredients locally, TV superstar chef Marco Pierre White, and training guru chef Charlie Trotter from the U.S.A. – a man renowned for his outstanding kitchen management.

Tutor Work-Study Grant, \$5000



**Margaret Main,
Auckland**

A desire to pass on knowledge to others & raise the standard of customer service among industry colleagues steered Margaret Main from 'doing it' to 'teaching it'.

Margaret first became interested in hospitality as a career when she left school and headed to Wellington to study hotel reception, followed by a three year diploma in hotel and catering administration.

"I still remember the school career counsellor telling me that I should stay on at school and focus on accounting, as I would be 'bored' by hospitality. How wrong that prophecy turned out to be.... I don't think I can say I have had one day of being bored in this industry in more than 20 years," laughs Margaret.

Now, after almost 20 years in the industry – moving through a variety of roles ranging from waitressing at the long-standing Prego Restaurant in Auckland, to being a sales rep' for wine and spirits agency Pernod Ricard, Margaret has started her own hospitality training and coaching business. The business, called Turning Tables, provides on-site training to various cafés, restaurants, bars, and catering venues within the Auckland area.

Now aiming to replicate the art of creating that 'WOW' factor, Turning Tables' training sessions cover such disciplines as personal presentation, food and beverage knowledge, customer service, front-of-house skills, induction training and sales skills.

Margaret intends splitting the Restaurant Association scholarship grant into two halves – with the first half enabling her to attend three short courses at the Auckland University Business School – training trainers, coaching and mentoring, and managing people. The other half of the scholarship will enable Margaret to spend two to three weeks in on-the-job study at an upmarket lodge-style hotel in Victoria, Australia.

Merit Scholarship for Secondary School Students, \$3500



**Jack Foster,
Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology**

Tapping into an extensive network of well-connected culinary professionals has enabled apprentice chef Jack Foster to move up from lessons at school, to rubbing shoulders with some of New Zealand's most well known chefs.

During his school years, Jack was employed on weekends as a kitchen hand, and assisted front-of-house at local Arrowtown café/bar. "But I knew I really wanted to become a chef in a fine dining restaurant," said Jack. "At the end of 2007, I was invited to Blanket Bay to meet former New Zealand Chef of the Year, Jason Dell, who talked to me about the challenges and opportunities of working in a professional kitchen," Jack added. "Jason then introduced me to his friend Grant Jackson, owner of Queenstown's well known Boardwalk Seafood Restaurant."

"Grant Jackson has become an inspiration and mentor to me - initially taking me on as a Gateway (apprenticeship training programme) student through school while I completed NCEA level two and several hospitality and cookery unit standards toward my cheffing qualification. I was thrilled when chef Jackson offered me an apprenticeship at Boardwalk, as he has such a great restaurant with an excellent reputation. I'd like to finish my apprenticeship and then head overseas to widen my career experience."

Jack said the Restaurant Association Scholarship funding will be gratefully used to assist paying some of the fees for his modern apprenticeship in cookery, studying at the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, as well as buying books, and contributing towards the essential tools every chef needs...knives.



Kelly Harris,
Pacific International Hotel Management and Training School, New Plymouth.

Striving to reach the senior echelons of hotel management is the career motivation for hospitality trainee Kelly Harris.

During her formative years in Tauranga, Kelly developed the passion to pursue a career which has already seen her gain several accolades - including the Sir George Seymour National College of Tourism and Travel Trophy for her school, as well as picking up a bronze medal at the HSI Junior New Zealand Challenge.

“The training I’m now undertaking at PIHMS, which the scholarship will partly fund, is increasing my confidence, skills, experience, and ability to manage personnel. Event management interests me the most and I see plenty of opportunities in this field.

“My career goal is to eventually become a hotel division manager, then aim for a general manager’s position. In the hospitality industry I believe there are no limits to what I can achieve and where I could go. Currently I’m learning a raft of new skills both in the practical side - through table service, kitchen work, barista and bar tending - and the theory side which involves management skills such as accounting, communications, research, & marketing.”



Erin Herbert,
Waikato Institute of Technology

Early childhood memories of helping her mum have inspired budding caterer Erin Herbert onto greater culinary heights.

“Living with a mother who is a high school food technology teacher, and an eldest brother who is a trained chef, it’s no wonder I have a passionate interest in the trade,” said 18-year-old Erin from Hamilton.

“Winning class competitions at school and lately winning my class at the Waikato Culinary Fare have grown my enthusiasm for the hospitality industry,” added Erin, who is currently undertaking a certificate in catering at the Waikato Institute of Technology.

When she eventually graduates from polytechnic studies, Erin has aspirations to work in France, Italy or Spain, or her dream destination of Dubai. Her culinary passion is currently leaning toward pastry and larder work – particularly the intricate presentation options available on sweet dishes.

Erin admits that without the generous support of the Restaurant Association scholarship, she would not have been able to attend tertiary studies this year as the cost of fees and equipment such as knives and uniforms would have been too great to bear. “The scholarship funding has already improved my ability to achieve, as I can now concentrate on my career without having to work full-time to pay for the fees,” she said.

Merit Scholarship for Hospitality Students, \$3500



Benjamin Frith,
Manukau Institute of Technology, Auckland.

Following in the shadow of a big brother has seen food-loving Benjamin Frith rapidly escalate his kitchen career from peeling spuds and washing dishes, to lining up to participate in one of New Zealand’s most prestigious culinary competitions.

“I was bored during the summer holidays. My brother Andrew offered to take me into work with him in the kitchen at Tribeca restaurant in Auckland. That’s where it all started - peeling potatoes and onions, and of course doing the dishes... which there never seemed to be a lack of. I wasn’t getting paid for my work but I enjoyed the sights, sounds, smells and the atmosphere of a busy service.” From Tribeca, Benjamin began working in the kitchen at the Prospect of Howick – a venue he has left and returned to several times over the ensuing years.

Chef Frith aspires to one day go into the hospitality business with his brother – although his big ambition for this year will be striving to represent Manukau Institute of Technology’s at the Toque D’Or competition in the NZ Culinary Fare. He is currently studying for a certificate in advanced cookery and a diploma in culinary practice at the MIT.

“This scholarship means that I’ll be able to focus a bit more on doing the best I can on the course and learning to my full potential. I’m working fulltime while I am attending the course so that I can fund the remaining fees and pay the bills. The scholarship has meant that I don’t have to take out a student loan for my diploma and it’s very much appreciated,” he said.



**Tony Chester,
Auckland University of Technology, Auckland.**

What started as a ‘fill-in’ job to help pay for a skiing holiday in Canada has now snowballed into a full-time learning experience for young chef Tony Chester.

“When I went to Canada for the snow, I got a job at a pizzeria to pay my way. The people I was working with were a great bunch and I couldn’t learn enough from them.... it was as if I just found my niche in life,” admits the 22-year-old from Auckland who is now studying an advanced professional cookery qualification at Auckland University of Technology.

Exuberant Tony said the Restaurant Association scholarship funding would assist in reducing his student loan quicker – and would consequently speed up his international career aspirations.

“I plan to stay in Auckland for the next couple of years - finishing my qualification and gaining a bit more experience before travelling to Europe to get some real experience. At this stage I plan to take the road of fine dining,” he said. “With this financial aid, I can also focus on pure learning and not have to worry quite so much about the money aspects of this year as much – like taking on a part-time job. This scholarship helps to say to other professionals that I mean business. In years to come, particularly when I travel, it will help me with future job prospects and getting into some of the better restaurants,” he said.

Merit Scholarship for Group Modern Apprentices, \$3500



**Niels Naumann,
Verbena Restaurant, Auckland.**

A young chef with outstanding leadership skills who is now mentor to peers only a few years younger than himself, has been selected as a scholarship winner for his ability to inspire others.

Niels Naumann is just 20-years-old, yet has already been identified by his employer and those involved in his training regimes, as a man with the potential to make a difference to the foodservice industry. Niels, who works at Verbena Restaurant in Auckland, was the first apprentice recruited for the Restaurant Association’s group modern apprenticeship programme in 2006.

Aside from his job on the pans at Verbena, Niels spends many voluntary hours each week assisting the food department at Long Bay College on the North Shore, where he has been involved in the production of a calendar featuring his recipes, as well as training students for the national Culinary Fare.

After beginning his tertiary education at the Manukau Institute of Technology and initially enjoying pastry work, chef Naumann has now moved onto the hot line, but is hungry to move onto bigger things – namely heading up the kitchen brigade in a large restaurant. “The apprenticeship programme has put me in contact with influential people in the hospitality industry and allowed me to learn the craft first hand.”



**Sarah Atherfold,
Euro Restaurant and Bar, Auckland.**

Kindly advice from a visionary manager steered young chef Sarah Atherfold away from a waitressing career and into the kitchen, where she is now enjoying the fruits of studying under the Hospitality Standards Institute’s industry-leading apprenticeship scheme.

After leaving school, but still dabbling with front-of-house service, Sarah spent several months as a cocktail waitress at Pasha bar on Auckland’s Prince’s Wharf before eventually transferring to its neighbouring sister operation, the fine dining Euro Restaurant and Bar. Restaurant Association training coordinator Peter Le Grice was

instrumental in guiding Sarah through the ongoing apprenticeship process with Euro.

“Through my apprenticeship programme, I have learnt about working in an effective team environment. I have witnessed a range of management styles and learnt to operate under different leaders. A successful restaurant relies on a strong team which is committed to the management’s vision,” Sarah says. “In the apprenticeship programme I have gained a sound understanding of the basics of hospitality standards. It has also broadened my knowledge of the industry – showing me the range of possible career opportunities available.

“I now aim to explore other areas in hospitality, such as cookery, catering, and management – and eventually, after doing a bit of travelling around the world, I’d love to open my own ‘local’ café back here in Auckland,” she said.

“There’s always something new happening in my line of work that I can get involved in. I think the apprenticeship programme has encouraged me to get more involved with the wider industry.”