

SPRING 2026

KENTUCKY

RESTAURANT JOURNAL

The Official Publication of the Kentucky Restaurant Association

Chefs That Sizzle

**ARCADIA
SENIOR LIVING**

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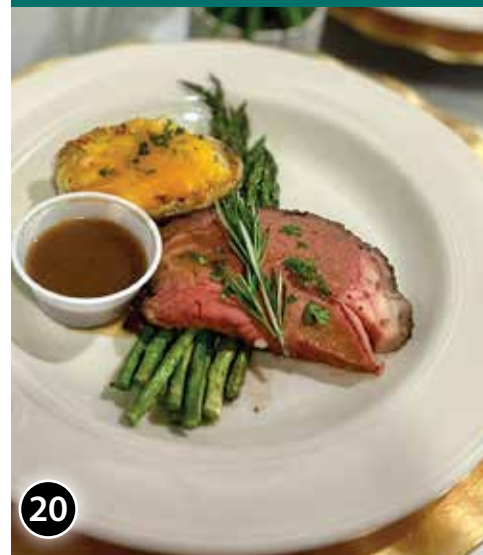
FRONT BURNER



MARKETING AS PROBLEM-SOLVING



CHEFS THAT SIZZLE



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Do you know a chef in your area who is creating a buzz with innovative cuisine, exceptional presentation or fresh new ideas?

KRA wants to tell the state about them in a quarterly feature in the Kentucky Restaurant Journal. Submit your favorite chef du jour to stacy@kyra.org. Please include restaurant and contact information. Selected submissions will be featured in the magazine as Chefs That Sizzle.

SAVE THE DATES

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| April 2 | Chefs for Hope at Savor |
| June 8 | Sporting Clays tournament |
| October 5 | Golftoberfest |
| November 16 | Restaurant Fall Forum |
| January 25 | Gala |

Chefs That **Sizzle**

A WORD FROM OUR PRESIDENT

As we approach Spring, we've already kicked off this year's events with our annual Restaurateur's Gala – not to be upstaged by a snow and ice storm, mind you – at the end of January. We honored many deserving award nominees and celebrated the industry in a big way. We plan events throughout the year to give members a variety of opportunities to meet one another, network, commiserate over shared challenges and solutions and have a little fun in the process. On Fat Tuesday, our Northern Kentucky Chapter held its 35th annual Mardi Gras for Homeless Children, raising thousands of dollars for their partner charities. We also hosted our annual Taste of the Commonwealth lunch for legislators and their staff at the capitol in Frankfort. Thank you to Kentucky operators from Pompilio's, Boombozz Pizza, Mark's Feed Store, Texas Roadhouse, McDonald's, Khalil's Catering, Bluegrass Hospitality Group, Kern's Kitchen and Papa John's for donating their time and delicious food for a legislator-favorite lunch, giving us a chance to thank legislators for serving and discuss the issues of the day.

We are in the midst of the 2026 legislative session, and you will receive alerts from me on issues affecting restaurants. Please know that if I ask you to contact a legislator to explain how a bill may affect your business

if it is passed, it is important. You taking a few minutes to tell your impact story goes a long way to helping our elected officials understand the weight of their decisions. Check out the Front Burner article in this magazine for some of the issues we are following and weighing in on.

As the year unfolds, you'll have all kinds of events – from Chapter socials and mixers to tastes, to roundtables and golf outings (June and October), to sporting clays in June and a Fall forum in November. Our Lexington area members host quarterly meet-ups and we are working with the Bluegrass Tourism Marketing Association on some joint outings. While I know it is often hard to make yourself attend things outside your business, it is my hope that I'll see you at one or more happenings. Consider it professional development!

Stacy Roof

Stacy Roof

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Calendar of Events

Make sure to mark your calendars for Chefs for Hope, April 9 at Savor!

MARCH

- 5-6 Kentucky ProStart Invitational - Sullivan University
- 8 Daylight Savings Time begins
- 10 ServSafe Louisville
- 17 St. Patrick's Day
- 19 Hoops Madness, Louisville Chapter
at Lou Lou Middletown 3-6
- 23 ServSafe Louisville

APRIL

- 2 Chefs for Hope at Savor
- 5 Easter
- 7 ServSafe Louisville
- 15 Tax Day
- 24-26 National ProStart Invitational in Baltimore
- 28 ServSafe Louisville

MAY

- 2 Kentucky Derby
- 5 Cinco de Mayo
- 10 Mother's Day
- 16-19 NRA Show in Chicago



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by SHANNON STIGLITZ

KENTUCKY GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS FULL SWING FOR THE LONG SESSION

The Kentucky General Assembly kicked off the start of the legislative session on Jan. 7, 2026 for the 60-day legislative session, where they will be responsible for crafting a state budget for the biennium. As of publication, only one bill had made its way through the process and to the governor's desk. For restaurants, leading up to the legislative session, there was a task force on Make America Healthy Again, discussions of alcohol taxes, and legislation reform the civil litigation environment in Kentucky. Additionally, there is legislation on catering that will make it easier for caterers to obtain an alcohol license and serve alcohol at events.

ALCOHOL TAX SHIFTING LEGISLATION INTRODUCED

House Bill 612 as introduced would eliminate manufacturers and wholesale taxes as they currently exist, and on or after July 1, 2027, replace these taxes with a 4% state alcohol regulatory fee on gross receipts of retailers and restaurants. The sales tax would still apply, but the state alcohol regulatory fee and the sales tax would each be calculated on the shelf price, added together, and then added to the customer's bill. If the retailer elects to pass the tax on to the consumer, it must be listed separately on the customer's receipt. A collection allowance of .25% is authorized and capped at \$50 per return. In addition to the state alcohol regulatory fee at the retail level, there would be a reconfigured state alcohol

regulatory fee at the wholesale level of \$.004 per milliliter of pure alcohol.

The bill also expands the local alcohol regulatory fee to include all cities and counties who have authorized alcohol sales. For existing cities with a local alcohol regulatory fee, the existing fee would remain in place for four years and subsequently be capped at 3%. The current cap is 5%, except for certain cities that were grandfathered in with a higher rate of fees. The expanded or new cities would have one year from the effective date of the act to authorize a local alcohol regulatory fee capped at 1%. Retailers and restaurants would remit the local alcohol regulatory fee to each local government. The effective date of this act for the purposes of this section would take effect immediately upon the governor's signature or the bill becoming law.

The bill has been assigned to the House Licensing & Occupations Committee chaired by the bill sponsor Rep. Matt Koch (R-Paris).

SENATOR PROPOSES LEGISLATION TO REFORM KENTUCKY CIVIL LITIGATION SYSTEM.

Senate Bill 195 as introduced would make meaningful tort law changes to improve the Kentucky litigation environment while limiting the risk of provisions that could be found unconstitutional. First, the bill states that if a plaintiff is determined to be 50% or more responsible for their injuries, they cannot recover damages. If there are multiple parties to the lawsuit, the plaintiff still must be 50% or more responsible for their actions. Another provision requires pre-suit notice of claims to ensure timely and comprehensive awareness for all stakeholders. An important component to the legislation for restaurants is the elimination of phantom damages, where a plaintiff is awarded healthcare cost compensation based on what was billed instead of what was actually paid. It removes the ability of third parties to file bad faith claims against insurers for violations of the bad faith statutory provisions. SB 195 would require the cost of producing medical records to be shared fairly between defendants and plaintiffs. It requires that cases be decided on the merits and facts and not just insurance coverage. The bill has not been assigned to a committee yet.

MAKE AMERICA HEALTHY AGAIN.

The Make America Health Again Task Force met repeatedly over the interim to discuss policy changes that could

impact restaurant operations, but as of publication, no legislation has been introduced restricting food ingredients or other goals of the task force. States across the country are considering legislation to address concerns around unhealthy foods, restricting SNAP purchases and restricting ingredient use. Several states have restricted certain food dyes and oils in schools and some have required labeling of food products stating that contained in these foods are ingredients that are prohibited in Europe. The courts are now engaging in these issues as states are looking to take action, instead of the federal agencies we rely on to protect food supply. As of publication, there has only been one bill introduced that would prohibit ultra-processed foods in schools. That doesn't mean that Kentucky won't be having the discussion on SNAP restrictions and ingredient restrictions, those proposals have not been introduced yet.

CATERERS WOULD BE ABLE TO OPERATE MORE SMOOTHLY UNDER PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Senate Bill 145, sponsored by Sen. Julie Raque Adams (R-Louisville) and chair of the Senate Licensing & Occupations Committee, has passed the Senate and is awaiting further action in the House Licensing & Occupations Committee. The bill ensures that caterers can operate in certain ways in regard to serving alcohol. It would allow caterers to operate at premises with a primary caterer's license. The caterer would still be required to keep alcohol products under lock and key. It would also allow caterers to have Sunday sales, even if it is not authorized by the local government. It would also require the Department

of Alcoholic Beverages to issue a license within 45 days of application. The bill contains an emergency clause, so it would take effect upon its enactment.

PENNY GUIDANCE ISSUED BY DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

After the U.S. Bureau of the Mint stopped production of the penny, it has led to decreased circulation of the penny and created a challenge for restaurants with cashing paying customers. To that end, the Department of Revenue issued guidance on rounding of transactions to adjust to lower penny circulation. Kentucky law requires that the sales tax be calculated to the nearest penny. The guidance from the Department of revenue states that rounding must not impact the collection of the sales tax. Rounding is suggested to only occur after the calculation of the sales tax.

The standard rounding rules are:

1. If the last digit is 1, 2, 6, or 7 cents - round down to the nearest nickel; and
2. If the last digit is 3, 4, 8 or 9 cents - round up to nearest nickel.

The legislative session is more than half way over, which is crunch time, when legislation will be introduced and things will start moving with a hurried rush. Stay tuned for communications from the KRA team as issues progress through the legislative session.



MARKETING AS PROBLEM-SOLVING

EMOTIONALLY CONNECTING WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS TO SOLVE
THEIR PROBLEMS AND SELL YOUR PRODUCT

by ANNE SHADLE

FOUNDER OF LEFT BRAIN SOLUTIONS CONSULTING CO & CO-OWNER OF MAYAN CAFÉ

I have been thinking a lot about marketing lately. My natural feeling towards it is, “ewwww gross.” To me, it feels manipulative and inauthentic and I really just want to stay away from it. But, I sell food for a living, so I can’t entirely avoid it.

I have been having lots of conversations with marketing professionals that I respect, not the ones that gross me out. One of the most consistent tips they give me is this: **PUT THE CUSTOMER AND THEIR PROBLEM FIRST.** I don’t know why this feels so unnatural to me, but I am working hard to reorient my thinking. Rather than putting my product out there first, assuming (arrogantly, perhaps?!) that, of course, the world wants it, I should be starting with the why. Why does someone need my product? What problem does it solve?

This is more of a storytelling approach to marketing. If I start with the problem, I’m connecting with my customers’ emotions and they can see themselves in my message. If I ignite an emotion in them, I may

then get them to take action.

I’ll share the best example I have of this, although it’s slightly embarrassing for me. But oh, well, here goes!

One day about five years ago, I was scrolling through Instagram and I came upon a single image. It was a simple Canva-made post where the author made a bullet point list under one bold header. The header said, “You know you have anxious attachments if you:” and then she listed 4 different specific actions. The one that stood out to me the most was “counting the minutes from when the guy you’re talking to texted you last.” It stopped me in my tracks because she was talking directly about me. I read the comments below the image and saw she was offering a class to help with these kinds of issues. Within about seven minutes, I had signed up for the class.

Ok, let’s break this one down together. There was nothing fancy or beautiful about this woman’s post

but it worked like a charm. She spoke to my very specific issue and incited an emotional response – “my god, she sees me! She must be able to help me!” and then I took action.

This is why speaking to your customer’s problem as the focal point of your messages is effective. There is an emotional connection. And if I’ve learned anything from selling lima beans and converting people to lima bean lovers for 19 years, emotions matter in sales.

The suggestion I’ll leave you with today is this: Make a list of all the problems your business solves for your customers. Then use those problems to frame how you talk about your food.

We’re selling food, not healing people’s childhood wounds that show up in dating, like that Instagram post was five years ago. But we are still solving problems. People need to eat everyday. They want good-tasting food. They need healthy food. They want to make memories over meals with friends and family. They want to make their partner feel

special and cared for. They want to taste something new that challenges and delights them. They want to share suggestions with their neighbors about where to eat that’s cool. They want to forget about the world and it’s heaviness for an hour or two and food can do that.

So, there, I helped you start your list with a few suggestions. Now you add some more.

And you know what, that class worked. I finished it and just four days later, got together with my now-husband. So, she really did help solve my problems. Now, let’s go solve your customer’s problems!

Feeling drained & overwhelmed by the constant need to market your restaurant?
Sign up for my Restaurant Marketing Class this spring to learn creative ways to share your message and grow your brand!

<https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/2026-restaurant-trainings-4794471>



In 2007, I opened Mayan Café with my business partner, Chef Bruce Ucán. Over these past 18 years, I have learned countless lessons about how to run our business sustainably and enjoyably. After working with over 400 small business owners as a business coach with the Kentucky Small Business Development Center, I decided to start my own consulting firm. With my clients now, we do a deep dive into their financial management habits, HR practices and marketing strategies with the goal of increasing efficiency, profitability and their quality of life as business owners. If you’re interested to learn how to run your business smarter, please reach out to me.

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June 8, 2026



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Sporting Clays Tournament

June 8, 2026



Elk Creek Hunt Club – Owenton, Kentucky

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I am registering myself for the KRA Sporting Clays Tournament and need to be placed with a team for play. **Individual fee \$125***

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RESPONSIBLE ALCOHOL SERVICE IN EVENT PLANNING

{ *by* AMY SHANKLE }

In 2017 a guest at a wedding reception event in Texas was repeatedly served drinks by the bar staff despite showing clear signs of significant intoxication. After leaving the event, the guest caused a serious car accident, resulting in injuries and a fatality. The incident led to legal action against both the bartender and the venue, highlighting the critical responsibility of event staff to monitor alcohol consumption and intervene when necessary.

Events usually involve friends and family getting together to celebrate which usually includes consuming alcohol. Responsible alcohol service is a crucial aspect of event planning, ensuring the safety and well-being of all attendees. Event organizers and establishments serving alcoholic beverages should establish clear policies for alcohol distribution.

During the event planning process, the person in charge should ensure that the serving staff understands the responsibility of alcohol service. Prioritizing responsible service by scheduling a ServSafe Alcohol class to educate the serving staff creates a positive environment that enhances the guest's experience.

The ServSafe Alcohol program teaches:

- Proven strategies to prevent alcohol-related problems
- How to properly check IDs
- Language to avoid judgmental statements
- To recognize signs of intoxication
- Problem-solving skills from interactive real-world scenarios
- The ability to understand the difference between people enjoying themselves and those headed for trouble with alcohol.

Benefits of ServSafe Alcohol:

- Compliance with laws and regulations
- Promotes community safety
- Prevents drunk driving, underage drinking, and intoxication without over-sensitizing servers
- Nationally recognized program
- Recognized by major insurance carriers
- Decreased penalties for alcohol violations
- Improves customer service and satisfaction
- Reduces exposure to alcohol liability lawsuits

Additional best practices during event planning would be promoting designated driver programs, offering a list of transportation options and communicating with the person scheduling the event your dedication to ensuring their guests have a fun and safe experience.

People have asked me, "why should I have my service staff take the ServSafe alcohol class?". My answer to them is taking the extra precautions to protect your guests, the community, the establishment, and your reputation; along with having the knowledge is your first defense in avoiding the type of tragic incident that happened in 2017 in Texas.

One of the most important steps in responsible alcohol service as stated above is checking I.D.'s. The 2026 I.D. Checking Guide is a great tool to use if you are not sure if the I.D. is valid. This year, the guide has expanded the number of documents in the federal section to help verify employment eligibility for I-9 compliance. Their website for more information about the guide and to purchase a copy is www.idcheckingguide.com.

Email amy@kyra.org to schedule a ServSafe class for your organization.

Cheers,

Amy Shankle

Director of Training, Kentucky Restaurant Association



Hello KRA Members,

I would like to introduce myself to all of you. I am your National Consultant and your point of contact at ADP® for the exciting launch of our partnership! I am able to offer an Exclusive KRA Discount!

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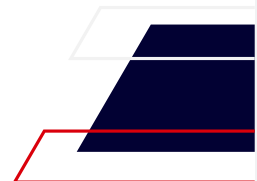


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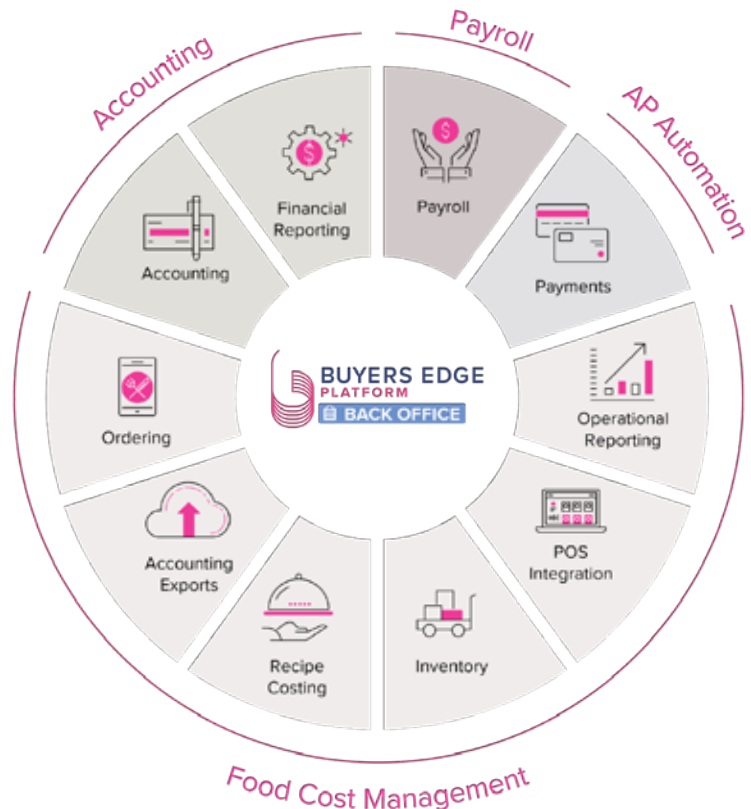
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RILEY GRIFFIN



by RICH CLEAVES, KENTUCKY PROSTART COORDINATOR

I asked Lincoln County ProStart educator Rick Cassidy if he could recommend a former student who has gone on to choose the hospitality industry as a career and he told me to contact Riley Griffin; here is her story

Riley Griffin

Riley Griffin was a junior at Lincoln County, Kentucky high school in 2022 when she signed up for the 2-year culinary class program. However, there was a problem with the classroom situation, "We didn't have a full-time instructor. The program was unorganized, there was no continuity to the lessons, and we had two or three instructors who came and went."

Riley wasn't too concerned about not getting much out of her culinary class because her intent was to study criminal justice when she graduated from high school. But in her senior year something very good happened; Chef Rick Cassidy transferred to Lincoln County from Indianapolis, Indiana and took over the ProStart program. "Chef Cassidy came in and turned things around. He taught us sanitation skills, knife



Riley in Orlando getting ready to feed the tourists at Disney.

cutting skills, and every week he had us prepare and cook all kinds of different dishes. We were always learning new things with Rick and one day it hit me, I decided I wanted to make the hospitality industry my career." Criminal justice would have to be carried out by others.

During high school, Riley assisted Chef Cassidy in his catering business, helping him prepare and cook dishes for the many catering events that were booked. Riley was one of the head chefs for the business. She also set up her own baking business at home, creating wedding cakes and other pastries for local clientele. Riley earned a scholarship from Sullivan University called "Jump Start" which gave her the opportunity to take general college education classes for free. When she graduated from Lincoln County in 2023, Riley enrolled at Sullivan University in Lexington, continuing her culinary education, graduating in May of 2024.

While working for Chef Cassidy and at a local restaurant in Stanford, Riley applied for an externship hospitality program at Walt Disney World in Orlando. "I was put through many interviews, some on the phone, some on zoom, and finally in person. An interview question could be what side dishes would you create to go with a leg of lamb entree? They wanted to gauge my creativity and culinary skills." She impressed the Disney people with her answers and culinary knowledge and was awarded a 4-month externship at Epcot's International Food and Wine Festival. She worked with chefs from all around the world, creating food for the 18 international food kiosks, feeding up to 40,000 people a day! One day she might be preparing Spanish cuisine, another day Brazilian food, or the next day Indian dishes. And during her time in Orlando, she took classes taught by the chefs called the Board of Hospitality Directors. What an incredible experience for an up-and-coming professional chef!

Since leaving Orlando in December of 2025, she returned to Stanford and was hired as the head chef at the Bluebird Restaurant, a very popular farm to table establishment in Stanford. And she continues to assist Chef Rick with many of his catering events in the area. At the end of our conversation, Riley said, "The ProStart program at Lincoln County High School changed my life. I know now my future is in the hospitality industry, and the opportunities are limitless!"



Riley is preparing another delicious creation!

And Chef Cassidy had this to say about his former student. "She represents exactly what this industry needs: young professionals who respect the craft, value mentorship, and are willing to put in the work. I have no doubt that her commitment to growth and her passion for food will continue to open doors for her. Watching her evolution from student to professional has been something I'm incredibly proud to witness."

Riley, congratulations on all you have accomplished and we know you will continue to grow and be successful.

We want to thank The Kentucky Livestock Coalition, Louisville Tourism, U.S. Foods, Sullivan University, Gordon Food Service, Illinois Casualty Insurance Company, Bluegrass Hospitality Group, Pompilio's, Dine Company, and Signarama East for your continued support of Kentucky ProStart.



Chefs That
Sizzle

ARCADIA SENIOR LIVING CULINARY EXPERIENCE:

A PHILOSOPHY ROOTED IN HOSPITALITY, COMMUNITY, AND CHOICE

What we prepare is not what you think is being offered in senior living. We believe we must respect the fact that we are cooking for people who have been eating longer than most of us have been alive.

At Arcadia Senior Living, the heart of our hospitality begins at the table. We believe that **food is more than nourishment**—it is a source of joy, comfort, connection, and identity. Our culinary philosophy is grounded in the understanding that a thoughtfully prepared meal has the power to brighten someone's day, create conversation, and foster belonging within a community. For our residents, dining is a daily experience that reflects dignity, care, and personal choice. For us, it is a calling.

Across our eight senior living communities, Arcadia prepares and serves more than **700,000 fresh,**

chef-driven meals each year. This impressive number reflects not only the scale of our work, but also the consistency and passion that go into every plate we serve. Arcadia offers a full breakfast menu, multiple daily specials and a Bistro style menu of salads, sandwiches and a healthy options section available all day. Whether it is a comforting bowl of soup, a vibrant seasonal entrée, or a beloved family favorite recreation from memory, we aim to make each meal a meaningful moment in the lives of those we serve.

GUIDED BY CULINARY VISION AND LEADERSHIP

Arcadia places a **high importance on the vision and mission** behind its culinary experience. Much of that vision has been shaped by the leadership of **Executive Chef Michael W. Riggs, Ph.D, CEC, CCA, WCEC, Emeritus.** An award-winning chef, respected educator, and hospitality professional,

Chef Riggs has dedicated more than 30 years to the culinary arts. His influence is deeply rooted in the way Arcadia approaches food, service, and the resident experience.

Chef Riggs' philosophy has become a guiding force throughout Arcadia Senior Living:

"I believe cooking and breaking bread with others is fundamental to a happy life. A desire to help others succeed has driven me to pursue my craft as a culinarian, educator, and industry professional for over 30 years!"

— Chef Riggs.

His dedication to nurturing both people and the culinary craft continues to inspire our chefs, dining directors, and culinary teams across all communities by shaping the standards, creativity, and resident-centered hospitality that define our culinary experience today.

RESIDENT-DRIVEN CHOICE AT EVERY TABLE

One of the defining elements of the Arcadia Senior Living Culinary Experience is our commitment to **resident-driven dining**. We believe the people we serve should have a voice in shaping the meals they enjoy daily. That is why **each community impacts its own menu selection** through direct feedback from residents.

This collaborative approach means our menus evolve organically, guided by the preferences, traditions, and input of the individuals who call Arcadia home. Residents participate in surveys, tasting events, resident council meetings, and regular conversations with culinary staff. Their ideas and requests influence everything from weekly specials to seasonal menus and holiday celebrations.

By placing resident voice at the center of our dining vision, we create an experience that feels personalized, meaningful, and reflective of the community itself. Whether a resident longs for a regional classic, a comfort dish from childhood, or a lighter, wellness-focused option, our culinary teams work diligently to bring those desires to the table.



EXCEPTIONAL DINING DELIVERED EVERY DAY

Serving more than 600 residents across eight communities is no small undertaking, yet our teams do so with grace, precision, and heart. Every day, the Arcadia Senior Living Culinary Experience delivers:

- **Three fresh, chef-driven meals daily**
- **Scratch-prepared dishes made with quality ingredients**
- **Menus built around nutrition, wellness, and personal preference**
- **Seasonal and regional offerings that reflect local flavor**
- **Healthy menu Options**
- **Adaptive options for dietary needs and individual tastes**

The result is a dining culture that blends culinary excellence with warmth and hospitality. Whether residents gather in the dining room, share a meal with loved ones, or enjoy dishes tailored to a special event, they experience the same commitment to quality and care in every bite.

Of course, the culinary experience extends beyond our residents. At Arcadia, we also believe in **supporting those who support our residents**. Every employee receives a meal each shift—an expression of gratitude and a way to nurture the team that nurtures our communities. These shared meals build camaraderie, connection, and a sense of belonging among staff, reinforcing a culture of respect and appreciation.

CREATING MOMENTS OF JOY THROUGH FOOD

The Arcadia Senior Living Culinary Experience is not just about serving meals—it is about creating **memorable experiences**. Food has a unique ability to bring people together, evoke memories, and celebrate life's



moments. Our culinary teams embrace this by offering a variety of meaningful events and experiences throughout the year.

Residents enjoy themed dining nights that turn the dining room into a festive destination. Special holiday menus add warmth and excitement to seasonal traditions. From summer barbecues to elegant holiday feasts, these events go beyond nutrition—they create connection, laughter, and joy.

We understand that many residents have lived rich culinary lives of their own, filled with traditions, recipes, and personal favorites. Inviting residents to share those stories and tastes enriches the entire community. Whether we are recreating a cherished dish from a resident's past or introducing a new menu selection born from community feedback, we honor the individuality and history of each person we serve.

ABOUT ARCADIA COMMUNITIES

The Arcadia Senior Living Culinary Experience is proudly part of **Arcadia Communities**, our parent company based in **Louisville, Kentucky**. Arcadia Communities operates senior living campuses across **Kentucky, Florida, Tennessee, and Michigan**, each committed to delivering exceptional care, hospitality, and quality of life. This broader network supports our mission and allows us to continually elevate and innovate our culinary vision.

HR IN THE HOSPITALITY HUSTLE

WHY SMART RESTAURANTS TREAT PEOPLE STRATEGY LIKE A SECRET SAUCE

If you've owned or operated a restaurant for more than five minutes, you know this truth: the food might bring guests in the first time, but people bring them back.

In an industry fueled by speed, pressure, and razor-thin margins, it's easy to think of HR as paperwork, policies, and posters in the break room. But the restaurants that are thriving today understand something different. HR isn't red tape, it's revenue protection, culture design, and leadership development wrapped into one.

Let's talk about what that really means for you as an owner.

YOUR MANAGERS SET THE TONE. TRAIN THEM TO LEAD LIKE IT MATTERS.

Most restaurant managers were promoted because they were great servers, strong bartenders, or talented line cooks. Being good at the job and leading the job are two very different skill sets.

When managers aren't trained to lead:

- Accountability conversations get avoided.
- Tone comes off harsher than intended.
- Inconsistency creeps into food and service.
- Turnover quietly increases.
- Guest experience suffers.

On the flip side, when leaders are trained to build trust and empower their teams, magic happens.

Here are three actionable ways to strengthen your managers to become leaders:

1. Teach managers how to have clear, calm accountability conversations.

"Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind." — Brené Brown
Strong leaders have the courage to listen, clarify expectations, and clearly state what needs to be different. Handled consistently, accountability builds trust instead of tension and keeps standards strong. Inconsistency is the enemy here.

2. Focus on tone and trust, not just task completion.

Team members stay where they feel respected. Aretha Franklin knew it! Respect drives effort. Effort drives consistency. Consistency drives guest experience. Guest experience drives profitability. How your managers respond today will decide how team members act tomorrow. Strong leaders are aware of and manage their tone in all situations.

RESPECT DRIVES EFFORT

EFFORT DRIVES CONSISTENCY

CONSISTENCY DRIVES GUEST EXPERIENCE

GUEST EXPERIENCE DRIVES PROFITABILITY

3. Build intentional pre-shift huddles that include connection and team building.

Five focused minutes reviewing service standards and food quality is powerful. Supercharge it with two more minutes. Add something human like a quick recognition, a gratitude share, a one-question check-in, or a mini team-building prompt. These powerful moments build camaraderie, psychological safety, and alignment

before the rush hits. Strong leaders know when the team feels connected to each other effective communication improves on the floor and guests feel the difference.

When your managers become leaders, they communicate with clarity and confidence which shows up on the plate and at the table.

COMPLIANCE ISN'T GLAMOROUS - BUT IT IS EXPENSIVE WHEN IGNORED!

Wage and hour issues. Tip pooling confusion. ACA and labor law requirements. Documentation gaps. These aren't fun topics, but they are commonly overlooked and sources of costly disruption. Restaurant owners may not want to dive into the fine print of these issues, but they certainly don't want the unexpected consequences that come from ignoring them. No one has a line item on their P&L for "Money for things I don't want to look at".

Here's some ways to be proactive with your human resources (which is everyone you depend on):

- Document clear wage and hour processes that align with state and federal laws. *Often missed and easily solved.*
- Standardize documentation for hiring, discipline, and performance. *The fix is easy, but fines are high.*
- Create thoughtful policies that protect business without suffocating culture. *See above, clarity, respect, and trust.*

Compliance done right doesn't feel heavy-handed. It feels like safeguards protecting the team and the business. The goal isn't to create a 200-page handbook no one reads. Create practical, usable and easily referenced systems that work in a real high-performing restaurant.

TURNOVER IS A PROFIT LEAK AND CULTURE IS THE PLUG

Let's be honest. Turnover is part of hospitality. But constant turnover should not be. Every time you lose a trained employee, you lose recruiting and training time, productivity, consistency, and continuity of guest experience. The reason people leave isn't typically because of the workload.

It's leadership, clarity, or culture.

Here are simple culture-building moves that can pay off:

1. **Structured onboarding.** Don't just throw them into a shift. Introduce standards, expectations, and culture intentionally.
2. **Clear growth conversations.** Even in restaurants, team members want to know what's next. Line to lead. Server to shift lead. Growth supports retention.
3. **Drive two-way communication.** Ask your team what's working and what's causing frustration. Listening and implementing feedback, even small changes, can prevent exits and encourage engagement.

When culture improves, guest experience improves and that directly drives profitability.

SO WHERE DOES HR FIT IN?

Every restaurant is different. A high-volume casual concept has different needs than an upscale fine dining establishment. A 10-person team has different needs than a 100-person team.

Effective HR isn't one-size-fits-all. At **Fostering Leaders**, we don't walk in with a binder and say, "Here's how you should do it." We partner. We listen. We learn the heartbeat of the operation. Then we tailor policies, leadership training, accountability systems, and culture strategies to fit your brand and team.

CONSISTENT LEADERSHIP -> CONSISTENT FOOD EXECUTION -> CONSISTENT GUEST EXECUTION

At the end of the day, restaurants don't just serve food. They serve experiences. And experiences are delivered by people. When you invest in your people, you protect your brand, your margins, and your sanity.

And that's a secret sauce worth savoring.
Susan Foster LaCoe,
Owner & CEO

Fostering Leaders



Q&A

You have

Questions

We have

Answers

Questions & Answers

Q: I have several different types of events at my establishment throughout the year, and I have a liquor license. What are some best practices I can put in place to reduce liability and safeguard public safety?

A: Scheduling a ServSafe Alcohol class for your serving staff would be number one on the best practices list, but here are a few others that can be done during the event: consider implementing wristbands for guests that are of legal drinking age, set a clear last call time for alcohol service and communicate it to the guests, ensure water stations and food options are readily available throughout the event to help moderate alcohol intake, and have list of companies and phone numbers for alternate transportation.

Q: Our restaurant loyalty program allows guests to accumulate points based on dollars they spend. Can those points be used to purchase alcohol in addition to food?

A: Points can be accumulated from food and alcohol purchases, but points cannot be redeemed for “free” alcohol, as alcohol can never be given away or sold for less than its wholesale cost. Short of having someone compute the wholesale cost you’re not allow to go under, which would be cumbersome and constantly changing, it seems the best guidance is to only allow accumulated points to apply toward food purchases.

From the ABC website FAQs:

Are coupons for alcoholic beverages allowed?

It depends. No coupons on malt beverages are permitted. KRS 244.461(3).

Retailers cannot offer coupons on alcoholic beverages. However, discounted prices using loyalty cards are permitted so long as the discounted price is not less than the wholesale cost of the product. See, KRS 244.461(4). Producers and wholesalers can offer coupons, including digital coupons, on packages of distilled spirits and wine sold for off-premises consumption. KRS 244.461(1).

Q: What things should you look for on an I.D. to make sure it is valid?

A: Make sure the I.D. is acceptable, for instance a driver’s license, state I.D., etc. Then look for these things: 1. The I.D. has a photo and it matches the person 2. The I.D. is signed by the individual 3. The I.D. is current (not expired)

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- Alcohol posters
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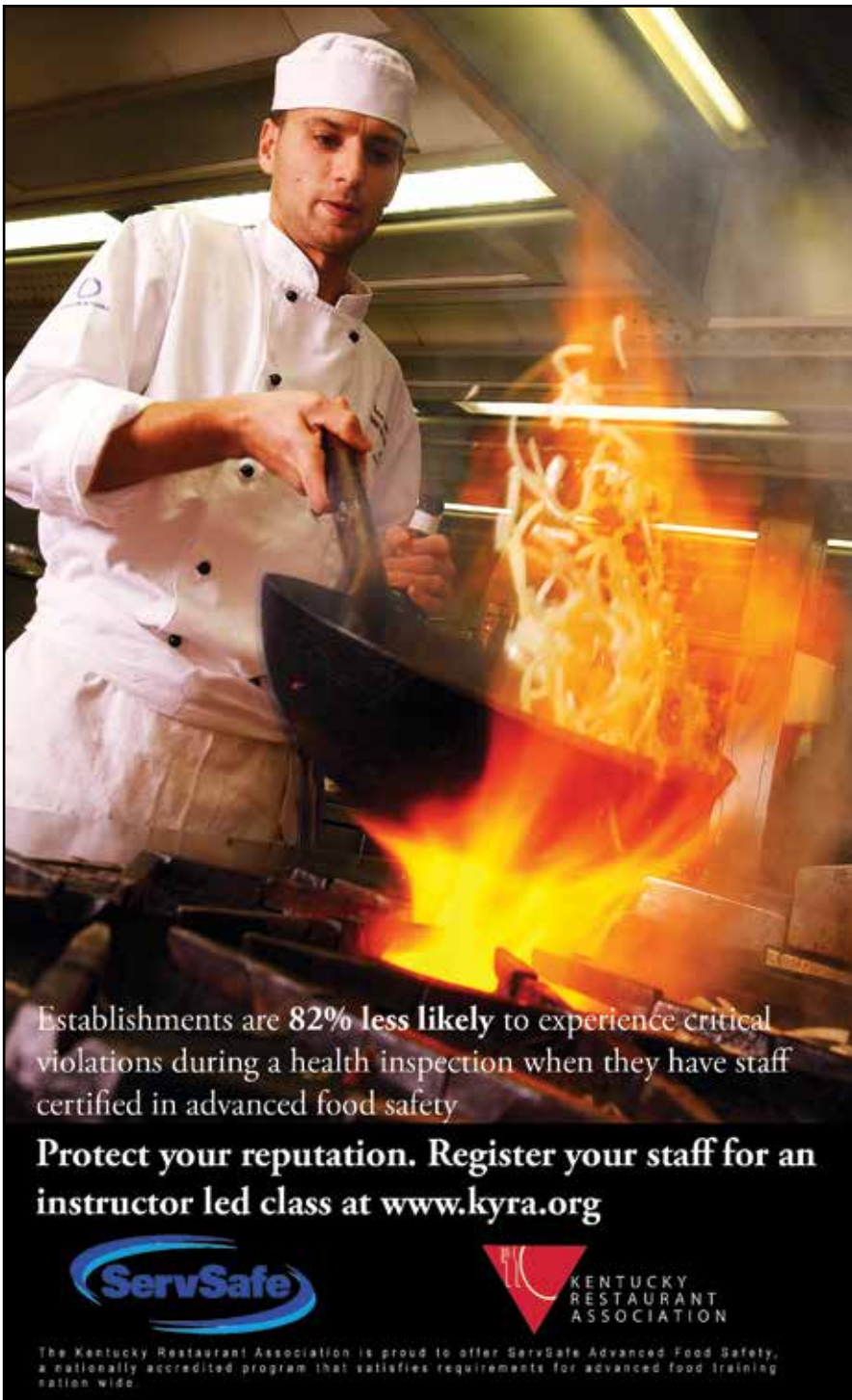
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REQUIRED STATE & FEDERAL POSTERS

Federal law requires all employers to post certain notices:

- Employee Polygraph Protection
- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Job Safety and Health Protection (OSHA)
- Minimum Wage / Fair Labor Standards Act
- Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA): The full text of the notice must be provided by each employer to persons entitled to rights and benefits under USERRA. Employers may provide the notice by posting it where employee notices are customarily placed. However, employers are free to provide the USERRA notice in other ways that will minimize costs while ensuring that the full text of the notice is provided (e.g., by distributing the notice by direct handling, mailing, or via electronic mail.)
- Family and Medical Leave Act: must be posted by private sector employers who employ 50 or more employees in 20 or more work weeks, and by all government agencies.

Individual notices may be printed from the US Department of Labor website at www.dol.gov or an all-in-one poster containing these six federal notices may be obtained from the KRA office. Kentucky state law requires all employers post the following notices as well:

- Unemployment Insurance Benefits
- Safety & Health Protection on the Job
- Wage and Hour Laws
- Child Labor Law
- Wage Discrimination Because of Sex
- Heimlich Maneuver
- Workers Compensation Notice



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