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'I Know I Am Only As Good As My Last Meal'

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'I Know I Am Only As Good As My Last Meal'

07.03.2008 | Service and Giving, Catholic, Faculty UD turned out to be an ideal environment for Chef Herbert Schotz, one of two Marianist Service Award honorees: He's always teaching.

Raised and trained in Germany, Schotz came to the United States in 1975 after an apprenticeship and three years' service working out of a mobile kitchen truck in the German army. Where he landed in Tampa, Fla., on a temporary visa, he found a shortage of European-trained chefs, abundant options — and everywhere he turned, unprofessional kitchens.

"Food is the most important commodity for human survival, and here it was being done by the most unprofessional people," he said. "Don Cesar, another German chef there, felt the same frustration in getting professional people."

It was like starting from scratch, he said.

"You must have quality, sanitation, fresh product," he said. "You can't just throw something in the skillet and that's it. ... So I thought, 'While I'm there, I'm going to train people.' I've been training people ever since then."

Schotz loves his work at UD, he said, particularly helping students learn the finer points of the profession. He's precise — always reminding his workers of the importance of presentation and consistency — but he's equally practical, with legal pads full of notes, tasks and schedules, and clipboards loaded with charts of quantities, guest counts, staffing needs and other data.

Events — from large wedding receptions and trustee dinners to the more intimate food and wine soirees he puts on with management information systems professor Tom Davis — bring him great joy when they run smoothly and have happy, satisfied diners. Consistently, they do.

"If I ever get to a point where I don't like preparing for Reunion Weekend or freshman orientation, that's the time to move on to something else. If you don't like your job, you can't be happy."

He is.

"All the places I've worked have been good," he said. "Anyplace you work can be the best job or the worst job. The job is what you make of it. I give it my 110 percent. I give it my all. I have never had a job I didn't like. If I did not like it, I moved on."? He's been at UD 22 years.

He's complimented regularly, but he credits his competent and well-trained staff.

"My staff has a say in how we do things," he said. "They make sure it happens properly because they contribute. ... If in your absence the place falls apart, you are a bad manager."

It's easy, he said, for a chef to become haughty, but he guards against it.

"You have to be humble," he said. "You get a lot of praise, and people treat the chef very special. If the chef comes out to talk to the diners, the diners feel special. If the general manager does that, it's nothing. It's easy for that to go to your head. I have worked with several prima donnas like that. I never want to become one. ... I know I am only as good as my last meal."

Schotz and his wife, Patty, a native Daytonian, have two grown children, Spencer and Heidi, and four grandchildren.

— Maureen Schlangen