

CERTIFICATION

The Road to Creating Edible Art

By Kami R. Smith, CEPC®

The road toward any goal can be filled with challenges, frustrations and roadblocks. My road to certification had many surprising twists and turns that led me down a path I never dreamt of traveling.

After graduating with a degree in foods, nutrition and dietetics from Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tenn., my plan was to attend graduate school and work toward a registered dietitian degree in the healthcare foodservice field. After a family member was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, the experience derailed my healthcare ambitions. And after having had enough of hospitals to last me a lifetime, I no longer had the desire to pursue that goal.

What now? What was I supposed to do with a degree in nutrition if I wasn't in a healthcare setting? I was without a plan.

My "aha" moment struck while I was flipping through a magazine and saw an ad for Johnson & Wales University's pastry-chef program. I thought to myself, "Hmmm, I really like chocolate, and I have a knack for making things look pretty." With my parents' encouragement, in just a few months I was traveling down a new road headed toward a new goal.

With an associate degree in baking and pastry arts from Johnson & Wales University, Charleston, S.C., I was richly equipped with a new passion in life—creating edible art. The various production

positions I held took me from restaurants to high-volume hotels, bakery/cafes and pastry instruction, and even landed me on a TV show, "Cooking with Chef Kami." Veering off into a unique type of pastry position, I entered the world of research and development at Schwan's Bakery, Inc., Atlanta, as a research pastry chef. Working side-by-side with food technologists and scientists was an amazing experience.

From there, an opportunity opened with Schwan's Food Service, Atlanta, as a manager of culinary services under the direction and mentorship of Kit Kiefer, CEC, CCE, AAC. Working with him changed my life. He challenged my technical writing skills, menu development and culinary knowledge.

Kiefer was the one who stressed the importance of obtaining ACF certification to advance within the industry. Until then, I didn't know much about certification or the value it could bring to my career. So, with his direction and leadership, I began the certification process. Within a few months, I found myself standing in front of three ACF-approved certification evaluators at a practical exam demonstrating my skills and abilities. Soon after, I was awarded my Certified Executive Pastry Chef® certification.

Since achieving certification, I am more confident in myself and my abilities. I am proud of my accomplishment, and continually strive to be a better chef. After receiving my certification, I returned to my passion and joined the culinary team at



Dawn Foodservice, a division of Dawn Food Products, Inc., Atlanta, as corporate pastry chef. Certification has advanced me within the industry, brings value to my culinary team and assures my customers that I can and will deliver viable solutions.

ACF has provided the tools, support and a safe haven for me to flourish. I encourage you to accept the certification challenge. Whether your road leads you to Certified Culinarian® or Certified Master Pastry Chef®, the certification path is vital for your personal and professional development.

I'm thankful for mentors past and current who have fostered me in my career. Now it's my turn to give back and inspire those around me to be great and stay passionate. I wish you "foodie love" and great success.



ACF Certified Executive Pastry Chef®

CEPC Spotlight News

- A new Certified Executive Pastry Chef® written exam launched Aug. 1. The purpose of the exam is to assess the knowledge and skills of an executive pastry chef. The CEPC® certification underwent a job analysis, making the exam relevant to today's executive pastry chef. www.acfchefs.org/CEPC
- How sweet it is to have ACF certified chefs Megan Ketover, CEPC®, and Orlando Santos, CEPC®, compete on Bravo's "Top Chef, Just Desserts" starting Aug. 24.