A Chef

Mr. Bob Miliam
Executive Chef
Fine Host
Charleston, West Virginia



What made you decide to enter this business?

It started when I was in Junior High when both my parents worked. If we waited on my Dad to cook dinner, we would have to wait until Mom got home anyway. She would finish whatever he had started. So, to be able to eat when my Mom got home, I started cooking and I just liked it!

How long have you been in this profession?

I graduated from the Greenbrier in 1976 and I've been working with food ever since. That's 26 years.

How long have you been employed by Fine Host?

Four and a half years.

What are other related jobs in this field?

I have worked as a dishwasher, fry cook, food sales representative, private chef, food production manager, and in a hospital as executive chef. Other fields are in healthcare as a dietician, school cafeterias, instructor in culinary arts, and restaurant managers.

What type of training is recommended for this type of work?

Formal training from a culinary school and a business degree from a college. The better training you get the better you will do. It is next to impossible to work your way up through the ranks to management in this field.

What types of responsibilities come with your job?

I do everything. I order food, do inventory and receiving, payroll and scheduling. I also prepare, cook and serve the food, and prepare menus. Aside from the food aspect of the job, I also act as a guidance counselor, human resource worker, disciplinarian, teacher, trainer and oversee the operations in the kitchen.

What salary range could be expected for this position at entry level?

It ranges from experience and size of establishment. On the average, you can expect anywhere from \$45,000 to \$60,000 annually.

What would you look for if you were to hire a person to do the same job as you do?

First I would look at their education; they have to know a lot in order to do everything. Then I would look at their personality. In this business being cocky will get you nowhere fast. I would look for a good work history and good attendance record. All of this is very important.

What do you find most rewarding about your job?

Beating the challenges I face. I don't know what I would do besides cooking; I love it. I enjoy the compliments that I receive, and my "pat" response is 'I have a good team'.

What are the drawbacks of this field?

The long hours and irregular events. When you work in catering, you work when you can and take off when you can. You only have work when you get a contract. It is ideal to have a regular restaurant and do catering also. Besides that, most kitchens are hot and that makes you sweaty. Then there are the concrete floors which are bad on your back, feet, and legs. It also involves a lot of physical lifting. Because the contracts fluctuate, there isn't a steady flow of income.

What type of schedule is there in this field?

It varies for each event. Sometimes we work 18 hours or more in one day, and other days we have no work at all.

What advice would you give to someone entering this field?

If it is your first time in food service, you need to work hard at it for about two years. If you don't like it, get out of the business. That is true in any occupation. Should you decide to stay in the field, work even harder. Continue your education; take classes, think of ways to make your work and better your work environment. Keep a good attitude. Don't party too much. Have fun while you work but be responsible.

If you could redo your career choice, would you do it all over again?

If I knew then what I know now, I would have stayed in the service. I would be retired by now, relaxing somewhere, fishing! Still I love what I do and I think I am good at it.

Interviewed by Terri Leigh Skinner for a College 101 assignment on 05/02.