Culinary Grad Cooks Up New Adventure

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Used to working in large commercial kitchens, PNW BOCES Culinary grad Matt Safarowic is currently navigating a small galley kitchen without an open flame. It’s the kind of challenge he has been willing to face throughout his 20-year career.

“In this business you have to be flexible,” he said.

Currently the guest culinary artist at the Bedford Playhouse, an art-house movie theater on the Bedford Village Green, he’s carefully curated a café menu designed for a discerning crowd with sophisticated palates. This is the kind of place where your pretzel bites come with fontina truffle béchamel sauce.

It’s a short-term gig for Safarowic, who said he will soon be announcing a new restaurant project which, like all his other culinary ventures, will be Westchester-based. Until recently he and his wife and partner, Christina Drake, owned and operated two very popular eateries in Katonah; The Whitlock, which earned a Michelin mention in 2020, and the Jay Street Café, which was awarded Best New Café by Westchester Magazine, also in 2020.

Those were preceded by a number of restaurant experiences at some of the top venues in Westchester, including the Cookery in Dobbs Ferry, the Parlor, Fortina, and Zuppa, as well as the executive dining rooms of PepsiCo and Hearst Publications.

And it all started at the Career and Technical Education Center at PNW BOCES. Before studying there in high school, it was Safarowic’s grandmother who engendered his interest in cooking when he was about 13. “We would cook Jewish recipes; whitefish salad, potato pancakes….I knew from then that I wanted to be a chef,” he said.

And so it was a given that he would enroll in the BOCES Culinary program in 1997, for his junior and senior years at Lakeland High School.

“BOCES was amazing,” he said. “It taught me a lot, instead of learning everything on the job.”
BOCES also opened doors for him to participate in his senior year in a work-study program at the Crystal Bay restaurant in Peekskill.

Safarowic said that, thanks to the BOCES Culinary program, he was better prepared than others in the field when he enrolled in the Johnson and Wales culinary arts program, and his BOCES lessons live on.

“You’re 100% ahead of the competition, and you learn a lot of the business before you fully dive into work. It’s a great way to get kids started and to let them know what it’s about,” he said.

**Photo Credit: Ricky Restiano Photography**