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Taste of Harbor Springs this Saturday

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By Maggie Peterson News-Review Staff Writer

Friday, September 19, 2008 1:07 PM EDT

At hearing he's called a success story, Jeff Radle gets a puzzled look on his face.

But that's the phrase Mary Ellen Hughes, founder of Taste of Harbor Springs, used for Radle, who works at Little Traverse Bay Golf Club Restaurant. He was one of the first two recipients of the Taste of Harbor Springs culinary arts scholarships, to be used for education.

She said the hope from the beginning was that once trained in the culinary arts, new graduates will return to the area with their skills.

"I call (Radle) one of my success stories ... Someone did take those talents and bring them back here," Hughes noted.

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Radle, a Harbor Springs resident, started in the restaurant business as a prep cook at Stafford's Pier in 1988.

"The chef at the time ... was Bob Vala. He's the one that kind of sparked my interest in the culinary field," Radle recalled.

He worked at The Pier until going to Lake Superior State in the fall of 1992. When he came back to the area after that school year in spring 1993, he began his career at Little Traverse Golf Club Restaurant as a line cook.

"That point's really when I decided I wanted to be a chef," Radle said.

As he rose the ranks to sous chef, he said he realized he would be stagnant in his career without furthering his education. He applied at Grand Rapids Community College to attend the hospitality education division, and he applied for the scholarship through Taste of Harbor Springs.

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The details:

What: Taste of Harbor Springs

When: Noon-3 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 20

Where: Waterfront, Harbor Springs

Tickets: Cost is \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door. Tickets are available through the Harbor Springs and Petoskey chambers of commerce and Mary Ellen's Place in Harbor Springs.

More info: Call Mary Ellen Hughes at (231) 526-5591 or the Harbor Springs chamber at (231) 526-7999.

He received the scholarship, and entered the college that fall. In 1998, he completed his associate in applied arts and sciences for culinary arts, finishing second in his class.

"I do feel like I made the food better. I learned a lot about plate presentation, more about (from) scratch cooking," he said of his education.

Radle said he always wanted to return to Northern Michigan, specifically the Harbor Springs area where he grew up, upon completion of his degree.

"The area was the biggest draw, but this is where I wanted to continue my career," he noted.

Radle began working with Vala once again in May 1998, this time as a chef's apprentice at the Crow's Nest. But a phone call from Little Traverse Bay Golf Club Restaurant in September would change that.

The restaurant had an opening for executive chef, and Radle was being encouraged to apply. He did, and was hired at the interview.

He served as executive chef for the restaurant until April 2007, when he became general manager.

But although he's not working right in the kitchen, he said he still works with the menu and many of his influences are on it.

"I'm still responsible for writing the menu, with the chef's input," Radle noted.

He and current executive chef Tom Holt will be at the Taste of Harbor Springs this year on Saturday, Sept. 20, serving up shrimp-cargot, which is shrimp in the style of escargot. The 15th annual event is scheduled for noon-3 p.m. at the Harbor Springs waterfront.

"I've been to every Taste of Harbor except for one, and that was because of the birth of my first child," Radle said.

Little Traverse Bay Golf Club Restaurant will be one of an expected 25 to 30 restaurants from the Harbor Springs area that will be offering samples of their dishes. There will be a few wine distributors as well.

Hughes said not only is the event another reason to visit the city, proceeds from the event go to local scholarships. Two \$1,000 culinary arts scholarships are awarded annually.

In addition to the food and beverages, the Harbor Springs Community Band will perform during the event.

Tickets for the event are available through the Harbor Springs and Petoskey chambers of commerce and Mary Ellen's Place in Harbor Springs. Cost is \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door, and includes unlimited eating for three hours.

In case of inclement weather, the event will take place at Walstrom Marine in Harbor Springs.

For more information, call Hughes at (231) 526-5591 or the Harbor Springs chamber at (231) 526-7999.

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