

Recipe for Success

An address to the
Fall 2004 Algonquin College Convocation
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and 2004 Algonquin College Alumnus of the Year

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National Arts Centre

Good evening Minister Chambers, President Gillett, Algonquin faculty, families and friends.

And good evening to you, Algonquin graduates. It's an honour for me to be here tonight, to share in what is such an important celebration for you.

I'd like to begin by congratulating each of you on your accomplishment. It's a big undertaking to pursue post-secondary studies. You've invested a lot of time and energy to get here tonight, and for that you should be very proud.

I feel proud tonight, too—proud to be part of this community of Algonquin graduates, and proud to have been recognized as Alumnus of the Year for 2004.

A lot has changed for me since I graduated from Algonquin 22 years ago. After completing the Chef's Apprentice program, I went on to compete in high-level culinary competitions—locally, provincially and at the international level. I worked in the kitchens of various five-star hotels and eventually landed a position as Executive Chef at the Corel Centre. I now run the food operations there, including managing the award-winning Scotia Club Restaurant.

It's a job I really love. It allows me to spend my days living my two passions—cooking and hockey.

I am a huge sports fan. If you don't believe me, you can check my son's birth certificate: his initials are NHL.

It's been an amazing experience for me to meet so many great athletes—Wayne Gretzky, Daniel Alfredsson, Dominic Hasek and so many more. I've met great performing artists too, like Shania Twain and Garth Brooks.

It was also my pleasure to work with Jacques Martin over the past three years, doing *Cook with the Coach* cooking demonstrations sponsored by the LCBO.

Indeed, I've had a lot of great opportunities in my career. But it hasn't always been easy.

I recall one occasion early on. It was my first night working at the Four Seasons Hotel in Ottawa. I was the banquet chef de partie at a VIP dinner for the late Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Everything was going smoothly until I started heating the consommé from the walk-in fridge. As it came to a rumbling boil, a rancid smell spread through the kitchen. The Executive Chef came charging out of his office to the soup kettle and asked why I was boiling sour consommé. That night, I learned how to recover on my feet. I had a new batch of consommé ready to go in 30 minutes.

It was at moments like those that I would take inspiration from the words of one of my biggest sports heroes, Muhammad Ali. He once reflected, "I hated every minute of training, but I said don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion." Ali was always so positive and confident. He'd repeat to himself, "I'm the greatest, I'm the greatest. If I say it often enough, people will believe it."

Aside from learning the essential ingredients for career progress and success, I've also discovered the tremendous rewards of lending my professional talents to the community.

I've had the opportunity to work with a number of different charities in Ottawa. The one that is especially close to my heart is the Children's Hospital.

I will never forget the day I visited CHEO with some fellow chefs—fellow members of the Ottawa chapter of Les Toques Blanches, a culinary club. We went to bake chocolate chip cookies with the children from the cancer ward.

The kids dressed up like chefs with tall hats, aprons and neckties. I still have vivid memories of their laughter, of the spoon-licking, of their ear-to-ear smiles. It was such a special experience for me. And I was amazed that when the cookies were ready to eat, the kids didn't just gobble them up. First, they took handfuls to bring to their moms, their dads, their brothers and sisters, and the nurses. Those experiences motivate me to give back whenever I can.

My family and friends motivate me too. My wife Val—who I met at Algonquin—and my son Nicholas have been so supportive of me over the years. Love and encouragement are powerful things.

As you hang up your grad gown and proceed on your career path, I urge you to find your sources of motivation and inspiration. Work hard and use your talents for both personal reward and for the good of your community. In the words of Ali, "Champions aren't made in the gym. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them—a desire, a dream, a vision."

I wish you all the very best.