

Cheryl Straughter

Soleil Restaurant, Boston

Interview by Brooke Childs, January 13, 2020



1. What's your name, and in what business organization do you work?

My name is Chef Cheryl, and I work at Soleil restaurant. Soleil is named after my granddaughter. She's 15 and her full name is Maya Soleil. In French "soleil" means "the sun."

2. What's your role in the restaurant?

As the owner, I'm responsible for ordering all the food we use to cook meals; I'm responsible for paying staff; and I'm responsible for making sure that the food is cooked correctly. I also make sure that the customers have a good time.

3. What service does Soleil provide for the community?

Our restaurant is a place where people meet and mingle. People also have community meetings to talk about what's happening in the city. Some of our local politicians and nonprofit neighborhood organizations meet here. So, not only do we provide food, we provide a space for

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people to come in and conduct business and also to bring their families to eat.

4. How did you get started in this work?

I always wanted to have a restaurant. In 1996, I opened my first restaurant, Keith's Place. I ran that restaurant for 10 years. Then I wanted to learn more about my craft, so I went to cooking school. I opened this restaurant in May of 2018.

5. What inspires you to keep doing this work?

There's something that every community, every nationality, and every race has in common, and that is we all eat. Eating nourishes your body, and that's how I got started wanting to do this.

What inspires me is my mother and my grandmother. They all cooked, and even though it was cooking in their home, there was always this conversation in the kitchen about food. There was always conversation about how we should eat food that's grown and you know, food from the farm. My grandmother actually farmed some food. So what inspires me is really kind of an old tradition about farming and eating.

6. Can you talk a little about where you get the food you serve?

Some of my food I buy from a restaurant purveyor. That's just a big word for a place that supplies food to restaurants all throughout the city. But some of the food comes from urban farming. This allows me to get food both on the organics side and on the typical restaurant side.

7. What's the thing you like most about your job?

Meeting people! I have bumped into people that I was in high school with, that I'd lost track of. So that's been kind of cool. I bumped into people that I met when I had my first restaurant. So I enjoy the interaction and the conversation that can happen at a restaurant like mine. I also enjoy working with my staff.

8. What's the most challenging part of your job?

Getting my staff to come on time is the hard part, and it is challenging to stand on your feet all day. It could be ten, eleven, twelve hours a day by the time we finish. Like tonight. We have a catering job. So I would have been going from four o'clock this morning to about nine o'clock tonight. So the challenge sometimes can be a physical one.

9. What final message do you have for first graders?

I'm sure that all of you all have heard this before about going to class and learning about different people in different places, but I think that's really important because there's a big world out there. The world is beyond our little town. I had the pleasure of working for United Airlines, so I've been to some really cool places in the world.

I want you to read, and I would want you to just talk to people who were born in different places, because we all have something to bring to our conversations. Thank you!