

The Business Journal of Jacksonville - June 3, 2002

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# JACKSONVILLE Business Journal

## ENTERPRISE

From the May 31, 2002 print edition

### Right recipe for success

Balance is key to high-pressure life for this busy chef

Diane Faulkner

Matthew Medure is proprietor and executive chef of two, soon to be three, successful Northeast Florida restaurants: Matthew's in San Marco and Restaurant Medure in Ponte Vedra Beach. Medure's third restaurant, being designed now, will break ground in January Downtown near the St. Johns River. He also finds time to consult for former employer Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island and teach cooking every Wednesday in his restaurants, as well as participate in a variety of charity events.

#### The main ingredient

For Medure, maintaining balance is a matter of attending to five basic aspects of life: spiritual, emotional, physical, familial and social. He starts each day meditating.

"Prayer gives perspective, and I find that I'm able to keep from stressing over opportunities," he said. "I've learned to just deal with whatever comes along. Otherwise, I'd be a madman."

Medure doesn't make it easy on himself. Rather than follow the norm of a set menu, his changes every day. "We work with a slew of boutique farmers," he said. "We see the product come in and then write the menus. If it isn't up to our standard, we refuse it. We've even refused an entire fish shipment, which meant we'd have no fish offering, but that's OK. We'll have it tomorrow. We have a philosophy, we have a standard to keep."

To keep up with his frenetic pace, Medure is careful to carve out some gym time.

"I eat all day long," he said. Workouts help to relieve physical stress as well as mental fatigue, not to mention maintaining his 6-foot-plus frame. "I'm athletic," he said. "I like to work out at least a couple times a week." Chasing his 4-year-old son to retrieve his chef's jacket rounds out the exercise routine as well as provides a dose of comic relief.

Medure learned the basics of balance in the industry early. As a youngster in Pennsylvania, he and his brother David helped the folks run their catering business in New Castle. "It was natural to plan our days around work. Not that I got to do any cooking," he said. "I learned by watching the adults cook while I did the grunt work."

Technique was learned at the Pennsylvania Institute of Culinary Arts in downtown Pittsburgh. After graduation came an interview with the Ritz-Carlton head chef. Medure was one of two graduates chosen.

Placed in Atlanta's Buckhead, he parlayed his apprenticeship into chef in one year. At 21, he was the youngest person ever to make chef at Ritz-Carlton. After five years, however, he was ready to go out on his own.

"Culinary school doesn't really prepare you for being a chef," he said. "They focus on the food and the foundation of cooking. How do you deal with people? That's what four-year schools are for."

Medure notes that to take your business to the highest level, "you have to surround yourself with incredible people who really

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2/12/2004



love what they're doing."

No one will want to stick around, however, if you don't treat them well. "You need to know how to get the most from people, and since that's not something we learned in school, I relied on self-help books. They're very, very effective. I'd listen to books on tape when I was driving from work to school to home.

"The help is out there, and you'll need it, because being a chef is very difficult. It's draining. Physically, mentally, emotionally. You're dealing with a lot of customers, and you cannot please everybody. And we're dealing with the senses, remember. I may have one customer thoroughly enjoy one dish, and another detest the same dish. I take that very personally."

Matthew's has received numerous awards, including the AAA Four Diamond Award, Mobile Travel Guide Four Star Award and Wine Spectator Award of Excellence.

#### [Fly away -- for dinner](#)

Medure strongly suggests learning the art of delegation as close to the beginning of a career as possible.

"But there is sacrifice," Medure said. "The long hours, the emotional drain from some customers and staff. Taking everything so personally can make it difficult to be married." It's a precarious balance, and so the need to unwind and care for the emotional and social self becomes important.

"I really enjoy traveling and eating," Medure said. "I'll do it often, just fly through a city and have dinner."

*Diane Faulkner is a correspondent with The Business Journal.*

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