

Hereford Times – Talking Point: Andy Link, chef/patron
The Riverside Inn, Aymestrey
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Are there any young chefs out there?

Summer is always hectic for us, but this year even more so, as the hot, sunny weather is bringing everyone out in holiday mode. So, as summer hits, we begin our hunt to recruit hardworking, dedicated individuals to join our ranks. Recently we advertised three positions at our restaurant: a groundskeeper/maintenance person, junior front of house and a junior chef. The responses were surprising with more than 45 applicants for the grounds keeping role, and nearly 20 applicants for the front of house job. But, to date, nobody has applied to be a junior chef.

I find this very odd. The food industry is going well the moment with the demand for high quality ingredients, ethical food and locally sourced food doing very well. Being a chef is still seen as a sexy role, with celebrity chefs getting plenty of air time.

Yet, for us, and others like us, there is a chronic shortage of young people wanting to become chefs/cooks.

Maybe this is because customer expectations are high, and in order to meet those expectations and levels of demand, staff can often work long hours, with the potential threat of a negative online review if someone is unhappy. These reviews are often very unfair, as any complaint could be dealt with effectively at the time.

Hospitality is responsible for six million UK jobs, and is our fourth biggest industry. Many established chefs blame the shortage of new blood on the difference between what is expected of the role and what the industry is offering. Furthermore, the age of celebrity chefs has raised the profile of the job but glamorising it can conceal the reality of years of hard work and dedication to get to that stage, and also the personal sacrifice – the chef is working hardest when everyone else is having time off.

The truth of anti-social hours and tough conditions can come as a shock to those dreaming of the limelight. However, for those passionate enough to stick at it, there is a huge amount of satisfaction to be had.

Being chef/patron at a fantastic pub like The Riverside is very rewarding, and worth every minute of the hard graft. It's also a very creative role, and one that allows for imagination and freedom in designing new menus and using exciting local produce.

If a solution cannot be found, pubs, restaurants and food outlets may end up shortening menus, simplifying dishes or restricting opening times to solve the issue.

I hope it doesn't come to this.

The food scene is so exciting in Herefordshire with Beefy Boys, The Rule of Tum and all the amazing, unique delis and cafés in the city, as well as a fantastic array of pubs and restaurants throughout the county. Add to that excellent produce, good beer and cider, and a beautiful landscape – and the role of junior chef here should be more than enticing.

So come on people, it's a great job, and if you put in the graft, you'll reap the rewards.