

Meet Salish Lodge & Spa's new executive chef

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By Dylan Chaffin

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A career comes easily when you're passionate about what you're doing.

For Matt Heikkila, the new executive chef at the Salish Lodge in Snoqualmie, that passion comes in the form of keeping to the lodge's promise of making quality meals from the freshest ingredients possible.

The Kent native has a decade of culinary experience under his belt, all starting with his restaurant experience that he picked up as a means of putting himself through college in Bellingham.

"The whole lifestyle behind it fit my personality better than anything else," he said.

Before he began working at the Salish Lodge about a year and a half ago, he worked as a sous chef for the Semiahmoo Golf and Country Club, also owned by the Salish Tribe, for six years.

He has also worked as a chef at the private golf club TPC Snoqualmie Ridge. He received no formal training throughout his career there, chalking up his talents to pure experience.

"I was surrounded by a lot of talented chefs," he said.

Heikkila now oversees 40 staff members and daily kitchen operations from the newly remodeled and massive kitchen space, designed to create the gourmet cuisine for which the lodge is known.

There is also a chef's studio outside the kitchen, designated for interactive cooking classes. Heikkila will lead the Lodge's Full Moon dinners, culinary happy hours and Salish canning classes, where attendees can learn how to properly can cherries and blackberries, as well as make apple butter, he said.

The lodge will also host a three-day "culinary food camp" in November, where people prepare meals together with ingredients provided as well as take an excursion to Pike Place Market in Seattle to choose ingredients for a meal that they want to prepare.

In his belief of using the freshest ingredients possible, he can name the source of anything from seasonal vegetables to the salmon used for an entrée.

The lodge uses salmon caught by a father-daughter company in La Push, he said. It also provides the kitchen with halibut and sometimes albacore. Herbs and produce come from Camp Korey in Carnation.

The transition from executive sous chef to executive chef was relatively easy, Heikkila said, because most of the new hires came from within the lodge.

The head chef of the lodge's upstairs dining room, otherwise known as The Attic, is now his right-hand man, he said.

"We're all moving into new roles, and we're going to keep pushing forward," he said. "This is a really engaged and excited team."



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