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Cookin' in the halls of power - City Tech chefs shine bright

In its 60-year history, the hospitality management program at New York City College of Technology (City Tech) has earned a reputation for producing top chefs for some of the world's greatest restaurants, but 2007 will go down in the review books as a five-star year.



That's because a pair of chefs with City Tech credentials—one an alumnus, one still a student—are working in two of the most famous kitchens in the country—at the White House and at Gracie Mansion in New York City.

Bill Yosses, who graduated in 1982, got the sweet job in January when Laura Bush asked him to step in as the presidential pastry chef. The news hit the national wires, serving up scoops of culinary-culled headlines like "Pastry Chef Joining the Upper Crust."

That same month Feliberto Estevez—who has four more classes to complete before earning his associate degree—also found himself in the spotlight. Mayor Michael Bloomberg appeared at City Tech for his annual State of the City Address, and His Honor let it be known that City Tech was close to his heart, that's to say, his stomach.

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Bloomberg told the gathering that City Tech "has one of the finest hospitality management programs in the nation" and that student Estevez, as the executive chef, "happens to be the most important man at Gracie Mansion." He then joked, "I think I get to eat his final exam, so I hope he does well." Estevez has been cooking for mayoral events ever since Bloomberg was elected in 2002.

The recipe for the successes of Yosses and Estevez? Each gives much credit to an essential ingredient: City Tech.

For 53-year-old Yosses, City Tech offered a chance to change careers in mid-life. Born and raised in Toledo, Ohio, he says, "dinnertime was sacred. My mother loved to cook and bake recipes from magazines."

There was something about baking that was good for his spirit, Yosses said. But in his twenties and early thirties, he found himself working full-time in the sales department of Air France. Then, when those inner connections to the activity he really loved—baking—grew too strong to ignore, a ready-bell within him went off and Yosses decided to enroll at City Tech.

He came to love the place; like him, many other students were career changers. "There were people out of high school, and there were people older than I, people who were lawyers and accountants," he said, still in awe at the diversity of the student body, in ethnicity and economic background.

He still remembers his instructors. "These people inspire you for life," he remarked in a telephone interview. After graduation, Yosses got what he wanted, a chance to practice his newly acquired skills in interesting places.

"I was lucky enough to get a placement in Europe, thanks to Professor Thomas Ahrens, who was a great friend and mentor to many of us," recalled Yosses, who makes his home in Manhattan when he's not at the White House. His career path took him to several noted restaurants, including Josephs by Citarella, Bouley and Tavern on the Green.

And then earlier this year, he reached a career pinnacle, as he was appointed pastry chef at the White House. Yosses

