



Australian Government

07
minister's awards for
EXCELLENCE

Sage Restaurant

Winner of the Minister's Award for Excellence for Employers of
Australian Apprentices 2007 (ACT Region)



“Sometimes they leave after all that training, and that is a good thing. You’ve given them the tools and skills; they leave the nest and fly. That’s how I see it. I don’t want them to feel as though they are still my apprentice. Putting four years into an apprentice is my gift back into the industry by way of the satisfaction of putting someone of high calibre out there. We always keep in touch with our former apprentices.”

**Mr Tom Moore, Head Chef/Owner
Sage Restaurant**

Husband and wife team Tom and Crystal Moore have operated Sage Restaurant in the Gorman House Arts Centre, Canberra for six years.

With a small team of 10, including two Australian Apprentices, Sage Restaurant is this year’s winner of the Minister’s Award for Excellence for Employers of Australian Apprentices for the Australian Capital Territory.

Mr Moore has trained over 20 apprentices in his career – about half were Australian Apprentices and

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the remainder in Canada.

When selecting an Australian Apprentice, he looks for: “A spark of passion. You can encourage it and nurture it but you cannot make it. They must be motivated and have ambition to succeed.”

Mr Moore thinks his passion – in both cooking and teaching – is what makes him a good employer to Australian Apprentices. “Number one is in the kitchen – I am ambitious and have set and achieved goals. Not only in cooking skills, but in life skills.”

“We have decided on a new approach to training our apprentices. We are trying to teach them not only to be a good chef but to be passionate, driven and motivated in and out of work.”

“A work/life balance is essential,” Mr Moore says. “Make sure that your staff have it too.”

Mr and Mrs Moore encourage the Australian Apprentices to cook, eat out and dine in their own restaurant. “We eat at each other’s homes. It is quite a family environment.”

“This shows the staff we care,” Mr Moore says. “We have a very low turnover of staff; we see that as a reflection of how we treat the staff and also how they treat us.”

The Sage Restaurant kitchen is a place for regular information exchange. “We are always talking about the industry. And we are always learning from the apprentices. We gave one a book on cooking and science. Now she’s teaching all of us!”

Mr Moore keeps the Australian Apprentices up to date by giving them subscriptions to magazines, and encouraging them to dine out and attend food shows.

Competitions are among the methods for seeing what is happening in the industry; Sage Restaurant helps the Australian Apprentices to fundraise for their competitions.

Guest lecturing and demonstrating at cookery stores and events, and contributing to newspaper articles keep Mr Moore active in the industry. “It also gives me opportunities to encourage young people to come into the industry.”

“I teach part time at Canberra Institute of TAFE so I have access to all the latest training methods. I have also completed Certificate IV in Workplace Training,” Mr Moore says. “I belong to industry associations and we involve the staff as much as we can. We make sure they touch base with other chefs.”

Hiring qualified chefs in Canberra has been difficult for many years, and Mr Moore has noticed fewer people entering the industry at the end of Year 10. “There has been a tendency to advise young



people to go into tertiary as opposed to trade education.”

He resolves: “The harder we work, the better our reputation, the more staff we can attract – training the way we do has built us a great reputation.”

“Working in Canada, I got into the infrastructure of training and setting up training packages. There was the need for formalised training for apprentices. No-one was really managing them,” Mr Moore says. “I enjoyed doing it, and soon realised the apprentices appreciated it too.”

To the aspiring Australian Apprentice chef, Mr Moore advises. “Find out what you’re in for. Speak at length to another apprentice. It’s not all Jamie Oliver. The first couple of years are tough. You must also realise that you are not just working, you are studying too.”

“We have work experience students, and we’ve engaged several in school-based apprenticeships, which then lead on to apprenticeships. Our current first year apprentice came to us through a school-based scheme.”

“We have a great relationship with our Australian Apprenticeships Centre, Caloola Skills Training and Job Placements,” Mr Moore says. “We can just phone them up when needed. We use them when signing up apprentices. We encountered a problem with a training institute and they were able to help smooth it over. They are excellent with their knowledge of government incentives and all the documentation that goes with it.”

Mr Moore has enjoyed some successes with Australian Apprentices. “We had an apprentice who previously worked as a greenkeeper and a mechanic then came to cooking. It was his passion. Another Sage Australian Apprentice won the Canberra Southern Cross Club Graduate Cooks’ Award and other competitions throughout his apprenticeship. From there he had enough experience to go overseas and in London worked for Gordon Ramsay. He is well on his way to a world-wide career.”

On winning the Minister’s Award, Mr Moore says, “It is nice to get recognition for this training. It would be great to find a way of getting other restaurants to formalise training arrangements. I am getting very serious about it – it is a passion of mine.”