



SOUTHERN SUN HEATS UP

A new culinary institute is opening the way for budding chefs in South Africa. Kerry Dimmer dons her apron

Great food – be it for a dinner party or the biggest hotel group in South Africa – is a vital element in successful hospitality. And the process of preparing great food not only benefits one person or organisation, it is a skill that guarantees employment and has the

potential to uplift communities. And with this in mind, the Southern Sun Centre for Culinary Excellence was created.

The vision was to address the skills shortage in South Africa's hospitality industry with a Skills Kitchen that would offer short courses of up to 10 days. The courses act as an intensive injection of basic

craft skills designed for junior cooks, commis chefs, kitchen attendants, fast food assistants, in fact anyone connected to the food industry wishing to improve their knowledge.

Southern Sun managing director Graham Wood says that the patronage of the South African Chefs Association's (SACA) latest offering has two major benefits to the group. 'Firstly we are addressing skills shortage needs by encouraging the highest level of short-term training and secondly, as the naming-right sponsor, we have access to the highest level of culinary skills from which we can recruit into our 56 hotels.'

Southern Sun has also offered three annual bursaries to the centre which further underscores the group's commitment to skills development. Current Southern Sun chefs will also have the opportunity to hone or learn new skills at the centre. 'Many of our chefs are involved with SACA and this is a way for them, and the group, to give something back,' says Wood.

The Southern Sun Centre for Culinary Excellence, in partnership with the University of Johannesburg's School of Tourism and Hospitality, is both theoretical and practical. The Resource Centre is equipped with a large library of cookbooks, SACA archive material and computers for use in web-based culinary research. The practical arm – the Skills Kitchen – is a state-of-the-art demonstration kitchen with separate sections for pastry, butchery and buffet. Television screens are positioned to replay techniques that have been demonstrated and the centre's recording facilities allow it to be used for television productions and plans for culinary training videos are under way.

The centre is not only about culinary expertise. An executive chef needs specific skills to manage a kitchen, such as good interpersonal relationships with other members of staff, the handling and storage of food and the maintenance of a secure, safe and hygienic working environment.

'The programmes on offer provide fantastic opportunities for potential chefs to develop their interest in the profession and gain expertise, and for existing chefs to grow in their sophistication,' concludes Wood.

To find out more about the Southern Sun Centre for Culinary Excellence, contact Janet Ogilvie on 011 482 7250.