

# Sebastian Sikora *La Cocina at the Cellar Upstairs*

To Chef Sebastian Sikora, “Food is memories and although I can’t replicate my grandmother’s food, I realize that, finally, I’m living a dream”. This hard-working Chicagoan /first generation Polish American, is recognized by fellow chefs and fans as someone they can count on. As Chef de Cuisine at La Cocina at the Cellar Upstairs, he’s a chameleon in the kitchen. He can adapt anywhere, as his career has spun him around many times, always ending up in the restaurant side of food!

Remembering his childhood growing up surrounded by fruit trees, fresh vegetables, his parents (especially father Vince) who loved to cook dinners for large crowds on memorable holidays, Sebastian never imagined that his destiny was in the realm of restaurants. When his family came to St. Augustine and opened The Black Knight Deli known for their authentic Polish foods of fresh smoked sausage, ham and pirogi, he spent years working alongside his parents.

Sebastian recognizes that great chefs come from different backgrounds with many commonalities – especially the love for food. Sebastian represents this passion, although he admits “I haven’t figured out my creative side yet. I’m never stagnant and I can’t believe that I belong here! My love for food and pursuit for knowledge are my strengths.” After graduating the American Culinary Federation (ACF) apprentice program, his career tells the story from working at Café Alcazar, Medure’s Ponte Vedra Beach and owning award-winning Dessert First Bistro in Vilano Beach.

Sebastian in his kitchen finds a serious, no-recklessness chef who has a gift for food, someone who feels each ingredient an important segment of each dish. He’s learned techniques and traditions from many chefs, bringing his own emotions of creativity into La Cocina’s kitchen. He credits his rustic time-honored core values to the changing seasons and family heritage of cooking.

Involved in many charities, Sebastian volunteers wherever he’s needed. To many, he’s nicknamed “Mr. Set-Him and Forget-Him”. He’s fine on his own so don’t worry about Sebastian! He blends in traditional Polish dishes that match each event with a spin. He thrives on expressing food as art, naming Mother Nature as his muse! His heart is St. John’s Technical High School’s culinary program, leading youth into various programs – a chameleon on the job!

On the road cheffing at the Master’s Golf Tournament is a career milestone. He cooks for topnotch companies including SiriusXM and Guardian Insurance. It’s a privilege to meet and cook for celebrities including John Daly, Coach Lou Holtz and Michael Jordan. “I’m just a kid from Chicago – so this isn’t just work but more like a retreat where I meet chef friends. The highlight is bonding and sharing stories”. Keeping traditions alive is important to Sebastian as technology and society evolve. His passion for making a dish of pirogi happens seasonally, especially around key holidays. In his family for generations, the recipe of filled potato and onion dumplings dressed in caramelized onion and bacon is effortlessly matched to anyone else in the region. Raise a glass to Sebastian and say “Na Zdrowie”!

*Leigh Cort*

*Sebastian Sikora’s Traditional Potato and Cheese Pirogi accompanied by caramelized onions, chives, sour cream, pork belly, and edible flowers.*