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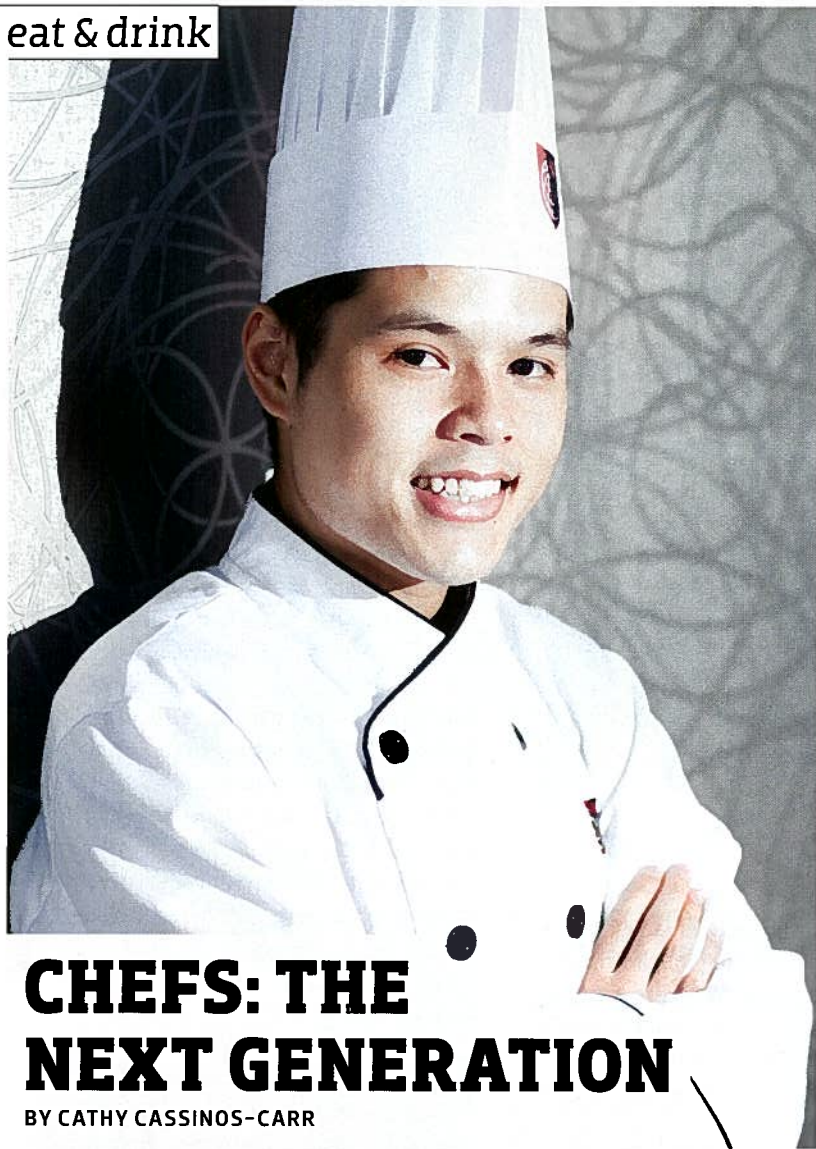
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Erik Fernandez y Garcia, M.D., rated a Best Doctor in Pediatrics



CHEFS: THE NEXT GENERATION

BY CATHY CASSINOS-CARR

W

hat does life after college look like for the next wave of wannabe chefs? For 24-year-old Tom Ly, who graduates this month with a bachelor's degree in culinary management from The International Culinary School at the Art Institute of California in Sacra-

mento, it's all about working your way up the ladder. "My ultimate goal is to earn—not be given—the title of executive chef," says Ly.

What sparked your interest in culinary school?

It's always been in my blood. My dad is a sous chef and owns his own restaurant in Texas, and I always loved cooking. But I didn't really figure it out until after high school. I wasted a few years at community college. Then I saw the A.I. (Art Institute) ads on TV and decided to look into it. I wanted to get an actual degree—a bachelor's—and couldn't do that at community college. It was an easy decision to make.

But private schools are expensive. Can you give me a ballpark of what you paid? Weren't you concerned about cost?

Schools are always going to be expensive. If I were to put a general ballpark on it, it was \$45,000 to \$80,000.* It depends on what you really want to do in life. I know I'll earn it back doing what I love. If it's a passion, it shouldn't be a problem.

What was the training like?

Everything from academic classes to hands-on in the kitchen, ranging from international cuisine to Asian cuisine and French cuisine, plus managerial training, leadership skills and more.

Was there a fieldwork component?

I trained at The Citizen Hotel, Grange Restaurant, for about three months, under (then) chef Michael Tuohy. He taught me a lot. I was offered a job afterward but couldn't take a job at that time.

Real-world training is the most valuable kind, don't you think?

The most significant thing I've learned from all my instructors here is the real-world situations they put you in—taking your experience and applying it to the real world. All of the instructors have had at least five years of experience in the field, and chef Toussaint Potter, the director of the program, is really well known, not only locally but around the world.

I know you're probably tired of this question, but now that you're graduating, do you know what you'll be doing next?

I know exactly what to do. I want to gain as much experience as I can on the hot line, and hopefully get enough experience that I can maybe work for a chef like Thomas Keller at French Laundry.

You're aiming high.

Yes, I am aiming high.

Would you relocate to build your career, or are you staying local?

One of my instructors taught me that in order to be the best, you need to work with the best. If that means relocating, I'm willing to take that step. I'm pretty ambitious.

What would you want other young students to know about culinary school?

I would definitely tell them it's a commitment to be made. But then again, what career isn't a commitment? It's definitely a passion, with long hours and hard work. But if you love the kitchen, love it as a sanctuary and not a workplace, it'll help you get through the two to three years of school.

*Art Institute tuition varies by program and location. According to the school's website, the median annual tuition for the Culinary Management Bachelor of Science program in Sacramento is \$24,864.