

## Profile: Matt Rapposelli

“Fresh. Flavorful. Hot.” Those are the three words that comprise the cooking philosophy of Ohio University Executive Chef, Matt Rapposelli. You can find him behind-the-scenes at the newly renovated Shively dining hall, wearing his white uniform and grey chef’s cap that make him look like he just stepped out of a French bistro.



“I am a food consultant,” he says of his role at Ohio U. Although his title conjures up images of what one might see on a cooking show—the slicing of fresh tomatoes and cilantro, a steaming pot of garlic-infused mussels—much of what Rapposelli does is administrative. His primary duties are to oversee training, baking operations, the food warehouse, and vegetable preparation.

Rapposelli has been immersed in food traditions and preparation his entire life. He grew up in an Italian family of food connoisseurs. He studied at the New England Culinary Institute in Vermont and owned his own Athens-based bakery called Big Chimney, which closed in 2006. Food matters to him because, sustenance aside, “Food is universal,” he says, “it will bring anyone together.”

The food culture of Ohio University was a new challenge for Rapposelli when he arrived four years ago. He feeds 8,000 students multiple meals a day, the sheer scale of which required a different approach than his small-scale bakery.

Despite the magnitude of daily dining demands, Rapposelli does what he can to purchase and produce food sustainably. He feels that buying locally is the best way to reach his overarching goal of providing fresh and flavorful food to Ohio U. diners. That is why he partners with the Chesterhill Produce Auction, located about 30 miles northeast of Athens. The auction enables the university to buy large amounts of seasonal, local foods, such as tomatoes, corn, and melons, by connecting to a network of regional farmers.

Rapposelli regularly communicates with vegetarians, vegans, and people with special dietary needs so that he can integrate their food choices into the Ohio University menus. To him, some of the best parts of his job are the personal connections he makes with young people through those conversations.

In addition to cooking, Rapposelli says that his other favorite activities are eating and riding motorcycles. “I can never get enough of the three of those,” he admits, and says that all his vacations revolve around those passions. When enjoying local eats, he goes for the homemade pies at Millie’s Restaurant in Middleport, Ohio or the “weenies” at Hillbilly Hot Dogs near Huntington, W. Va.

Does he ever tire of cooking? “Never. Never ever, *ever!*” he exclaims with a laugh and a contagious smile.

*By Annah Korpi*

*Photo by Rick Fatica*

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