

BUSINESS SOUTH-EAST

Cook-up call for quality

By CASEY NEILL

SPRINGVALE caterer Glenn Coleman has cooked for Madonna, learnt from Michelin Star chefs - and turned down Jamie Oliver.

The 31-year-old counts Dancing with the Stars, The Footy Show and MasterChef among his clients, and it all started with his mum.

"From a little boy I always wanted to be a chef. Baking at home with my mother was always a passionate thing," he said.

"I worked in a local restaurant when I was 14 and nine months, begged to leave school and become a chef.

"I worked in the school holidays, worked three or four nights a week during school.

"The day I left school was the day that I started my apprenticeship."

That was at Crown Casino where he spent a year learning the ropes at the various restaurants.

Mr Coleman took a job with another Melbourne chef then headed to London where he worked in a Michelin Star restaurant and cooked for then-Prime Minister Tony Blair and pop star Madonna.

"I was just a kid. I was only 19 and 20," he said.

"I can't believe I was cooking Madonna's dinner.

"I'll never forget the dish. It was an Italian cheese called borata and it was just cheese with tomatoes."

He moved to Ransome's Dock

under former Michelin Star chef Martin Lam.

"I learnt all my cooking and expertise in that restaurant," he said.

Mr Coleman came home to Melbourne and worked in Jamie Oliver's restaurant - for a day.

"Until I realised that his food wasn't up to my standard," he said.

"That was very disappointing and they were asking for far too many hours for what they wanted to achieve. That was a big learning curve."

His catering company Going Gourmet all started with a simple request for canapes from a former employer.

Mr Coleman agreed to make one or two products in their kitchen on his day off.

"Then it was three products, then it was four, then it was five..." he said.

"I ended up using the kitchen two days a week, and then three days a week, and then I've got people asking me to do weddings and stuff on the side."

He was making 8000 canapes a week.

"I'd work a lot of late nights, juggling a full time job managing the Royal Brighton Yacht Club," he said.

"Every single opportunity was there and I decided to take those opportunities and just really push the boundaries."

Wallara provided him with a unique opportunity in January last

year at Sages Cottage in Baxter.

The Dandenong-based adult disability services provider offered him a lease at the 145-year-old property and he saw an opportunity with an old tool shed, which he has since restored.

"We're booked out this year," he said.

"We're struggling for any free bookings for early next year already."

"Wallara profit immensely out of that. They take a percentage of our takings.

"I think in November alone there was about \$7000 for Wallara given back above and beyond our lease, and December likewise.

"There's no use in being successful and making money if you're not doing the right thing by the community, so that's a big focus."

Wallara also linked Going Gourmet with mental health organisation MadCap whose production kitchen in Frankston was running at a loss.

It supplied cafes where people with mental health issues receive training and help to get back on track.

"They couldn't keep up with demand and the quality wasn't there," Mr Coleman said.

"We pulled their menu apart and worked out what's profitable and what's not."

Five months on, MadCap was profitable and sustainable.

"Now the structure's there for growth," he said.



Chef de parte Sean Martini with Glenn Coleman. 133062

Picture: STEWART CHAMBERS

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Career of body building still fun for Laurie

By CASEY NEILL

Laurie 'Macca' McCoy started his apprenticeship with Norden Body Works in Dandenong at age 15.

He's still there 40 years later and couldn't be happier.

"The brain's just got that track - get up in the morning, shower, hop in the car and it comes here," he said.

"I still enjoy it, so that's the main thing.

"I'm production manager here now and I have been for 20 years.

"I love hands-on and I still get hands-on."

Macca, whose family has lived in Dandenong for 115 years, applied for a job at Norden on advice from a friend who was working there.

He met with company founder Ron Anson and his father Walter.

"In those days you brought your parents with you and had an interview," he said.

"I was lucky enough to get the job."

Many of his colleagues have worked alongside him for more than 20 years.

Macca's son Kane, 20, has worked on the factory floor for just over a year.

"As long as you can smile and have a laugh and you've got good people you work with, I think it's a big part of it," he said.

"You spend more time at your job than you do at home with your family, over

your working life."

Ron co-founded the company in 1959 to build commercial transport and truck bodies.

"We've had some tough years," he said.

During the late '80s staff worked a four-day week to avoid redundancies.

"There's been many times when it got to 12 o'clock Friday and I'd think 'Hmm we need some work for next week'," Ron said.

"We didn't have anything.

"Then somebody walks in the door and orders and tipping body at half past two, and saves the bacon."

Macca said many people who encountered hard times threw their hands up in the air.

"Ron hasn't done that," he said.

Ron said market gardeners with small trucks were his main clients at first.

A presentation about his job at a Dandenong Rotary meeting 30 years ago secured the company's current main income source.

The Dandenong Hospital CEO approached him after the meeting and asked him to fit out a disability van.

"I didn't know what he was talking about. I said yes anyway," he said.

Ron's daughter Wendy worked in administration for 30 years and his son Robert now runs the business after coming on board about 35 years ago.



Laurie McCoy in a converted van. 133952

Picture: GARY SISSONS

Two of Robert's five sons now also work there - Aaron, 25, is studying a bachelor of business and working on the workshop floor and Ryan, 20, is a contract manager.

"It makes you feel very proud, actually," Ron said. "Fifty-odd years ago I never dreamt that this would all happen. "Fifty-odd years ago it was a matter of getting enough work to open the

doors each day." Ron retired about 15 years ago but, at age 85, still visits twice a week to keep an eye on the business he built - and dedicated 56 years of his life to.