

HCC culinary arts professor named Educator of the Year

HOLYOKE - Holyoke Community College culinary arts professor Warren Leigh has been named “Educator of the Year” by the Center for the Advancement of Food Service Education, a national industry group.

Leigh, a professional chef and restaurateur who has been teaching at HCC for 15 years, received his award June 21 at the 2023 CAFÉ Leadership Conference in Charleston, South Carolina.

“It’s pretty cool,” said Leigh, who lives in Springfield. “It’s nice to be recognized. It’s humbling.”

Leigh also received honorable mention for CAFE’s annual “Community Outreach” award. He was nominated for both by Chef Paul Sorgule, a retired culinary educator and president of Harvest America Ventures, a restaurant consulting and training company.

“Even at a young age, he had a strong inclination towards serving others, and the kitchen drew him in,” said Sorgule. “His professional

work and personal life experiences became the stories that brought his classrooms to life, but it is also his unwavering commitment to professional standards, his passion for the craft, and his unique empathy for students trying to figure out where they fit that makes him very special as an educator.”

In receiving the Educator of the Year award, Leigh, co-chair of HCC’s Culinary Arts program, was recognized for his part in designing the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, the college’s state-of-the-art teaching facility on Race Street that opened in 2018; re-imagining the culinary arts curriculum; creating a line cook training program in collaboration with HCC’s non-credit business and workforce division; and pushing forward on his concept for a mobile kitchen where students could learn food truck operations while also teaching the community about nutrition and healthy eating.

Leigh holds a bachelor of sci-

ence in food service administration from the Rochester Institute of Technology and a master’s degree in management from the University of Phoenix. He trained extensively as a chef in Germany and Switzerland.

He is the owner, operator and executive chef for Hydrangea Catering & Consulting, and has worked over the years in many capacities at restaurants in Connecticut and Western Massachusetts, including The Standish House in Wethersfield, Madeleines in Windsor, and The Eatery in East Windsor, among others.

“As a product of his work myself, I can attest to his superb teaching and knowledge,” said HCC alum Matthew Enos ‘19, now an executive sous chef at Johnny’s Bar and Grille in South Hadley. “Chef Leigh has given me a great steppingstone to launch a career in culinary.”