



Gus DiMillo Wines and Dines Washington, DC

If Gus DiMillo couldn't own a restaurant, he would probably spend a lot of time throwing dinner parties because he believes "eating and drinking are the greatest forms of social activity known to man." It's a good thing, then, that he does own a restaurant – nine, in fact – DC Coast, Acadiana, PassionFish [Reston, VA and Bethesda, MD], Fuego Cocina y Tequileria, Burger, Tap & Shake [Tenleytown and Foggy Bottom – Washington, DC], and sister restaurants District Commons and Penn Commons.

Washington, DC is DiMillo's home, a city he has actively embraced, promoted and helped to revive over the past thirty years (he's originally from Lockport, New York). He started here as manager for Capital Management and Development Company, where, as captain at the River Club Restaurant, he met Jeff Tunks, who was the chef. In 1998, the two joined together with David Wizenberg, forming Passion Food Hospitality, LLC, and opening their first restaurant, DC Coast.

DiMillo's energy and ideas have made him indispensable not only to his own enterprises, but also to innumerable boards and committees. The RAMMY Awards of the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington grew to their current stature attracting national and international attention during his leadership as Chair of that organization; he is also chair emeritus of the awards Gala, one of the city's most glamorous – and delicious – annual fundraising events. It was DiMillo who single-handedly secured the sponsorship of Sustainable Iceland for the event. As a board member of Sustainable Iceland for the past nine years, he has not only been instrumental in organizing that country's Food and Fun Festival, but has also built a strong channel of commerce between our two countries, starting here in Washington with the pure and sustainable products served in his own restaurants and many of his friends' and colleagues' establishments, and expanding to the public by forging a relationship with Whole Foods markets.

In 2003, The Capital Restaurant and Hospitality Awards committee named DiMillo the Hospitality Ambassador of the Year. Together with his partners, he is an active leader in the community by supporting many civic and charitable organizations. All three have given their time and service to the Taste of the Nation benefit for Share Our Strength, Food and Friends' charity, the Humane Society, the Smithsonian Institution, and the National Zoo's Zoofari (of which DiMillo is a board member,) to name a few. Passion Food Hospitality was honored for its role in making downtown Washington vibrant, inviting and beautiful with a 2004 Momentum Award from the Downtown Business Improvement District; in January 2005, they were named Restaurateurs of the Year by *Washingtonian Magazine*; and in both 2014 and 2015, they were named RAMMY Award finalists for Restaurateur of the Year by the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington.

DiMillo's care for the city's past, present, and future is evident in his care in choosing the locations of the Passion Food restaurants: two are located in historic buildings within Washington's central Penn Quarter. DC Coast, a pioneering business largely credited with reviving its languishing Franklin Square neighborhood, occupies the ground floor of The Tower Building, the city's first commercial Art Deco building. DiMillo is a current member of the Downtown Business Improvement Development (BID) group and a former member of its Center City task force. He is also a long-time member of Washington's Penn Quarter board; the Vice Chair of the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington's Executive Board; a Destination DC board member; and a member of the Arlington and Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce. DiMillo is becoming something of a Washington institution, himself: in March 2009, he was featured in *The Washington Post's* "Restaurant Mogul" series, profiling a day in the lives of top restaurateurs. And in 2010 DiMillo joined the board of the celebrated D.C. Jazz Festival. As an avid jazz aficionado, this was music to his ears.

DiMillo got his start in the restaurant business like most teenagers do – washing dishes and making sandwiches in a coffee shop to make money for college.

"The first time I worked the counter at the coffee shop and made someone a sandwich, and they came in the following day and said, 'I loved that sandwich...can you make me the same thing today?' I was hooked," he recalls. "It is my passion to interact with people directly and to satisfy them and make them very happy. You don't often get that when you sit behind a desk in an office. To this day, Gus DiMillo still loves walking in the door of one of his restaurants and seeing 100 happy faces eating, drinking, laughing, and experiencing his passion. "I live my business," notes DiMillo. "I do all the conceptualization, development, design, marketing...I'm a real stickler for details."

It's not difficult to tell that DiMillo is embodied in the beautiful details and joyous atmosphere of each and every one of his restaurants. What is not always so evident is his hard work and guiding hand behind the success of their respective Washington neighborhoods.

For more information about Passion Food Hospitality restaurants, please visit passionfoodhospitality.com.

For more information:

Simone Rathle | 703.534.8102

president | simoneink, llc

simone@simonesez.com

simoneink.com | twitter.com/simoneink | facebook.com/simoneink

blog - deepfrieddiaries.com



David Wizenberg Knows the Business of Good Food & Wine

Fourteen-year-old boys want to hang out with their friends, and so David Wizenberg cooked up the perfect scheme...he decided to get a job washing dishes in an Oklahoma City restaurant because it was the best of both worlds – he could spend time with his buddies *and* make money. Not long after he started, the restaurant announced a competition for kids to learn to cook, with one slot available for a promising future chef. David and his friends competed. He ended up losing a friendship, but gaining a new job – and a taste of his future.

Over the next few years, David donned a toque and cooked at several restaurants in Oklahoma City before attending the Culinary Institute of America in New York. He graduated in 1984, but little did he know that a fellow student named Jeff Tunks – who graduated one year prior and whom he had never met – would play a very important role in his future.

Just out of the CIA, David felt that his schooling was somewhat limited and thought a more well-rounded education would be an asset. So, he headed to the University of Denver where he received a B.S. degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management. Upon his second graduation, David headed to the West Coast and worked for a large restaurant group where his education in systems and training was a tremendous asset. Working within a corporation to build a career at a chain establishment was not for him, however. His desire to escape the corporate world brought him to a position as Food and Beverage Director of a small hotel company and, in just under two years, David began to realize that he missed operations and would rather spend his time going from table to table instead of meeting to meeting. And so the boy who was raised in Baltimore and Oklahoma City decided to head back east, and he found himself working for a company alongside two geniuses: Gus DiMillo and Jeff Tunks.

It wasn't long before the three decided to jump into the frying pan together by opening DC Coast with Jeff as Executive Chef overseeing all culinary decisions, Gus as service and marketing executive, and David overseeing the beverage department and acting as decision-maker for financial and business arrangements. "In hindsight, I can say that I wasn't a very patient student. I am someone who is focused on the end result as opposed to 'the process' and while I did well at the CIA, I realized there were many more talented chefs who had a greater passion for the art of cooking."

Wizenberg developed a passion for wines over the years, and his exposure to wines has given him a unique perspective in the operation of a restaurant; he believes that wine and spirits are often overlooked when, in fact, they can account for as much as 50 percent of the total sales. His intimate knowledge of cooking, acute taste-buds, personal interest in wine, and business training combine to create a restaurateur who understands the vision of his chefs, confidently pairs wines with food, and maximizes the efficiency of his operations.

Today, David, Gus, and Jeff have developed a restaurant group under the name of Passion Food Hospitality that has cornered the market in DC for presenting the finest in seafood establishments. The group currently owns and operates collection of nine restaurants in the DC Metropolitan area: Acadiana, Burger, Tap & Shake [Foggy Bottom and Tenleytown neighborhoods of Washington, DC], DC Coast, District Commons, Penn Commons, Fuego Cocina y Tequileria and PassionFish [Reston, VA and Bethesda, MD]. Since beginning Passion Food Hospitality in 1998, the team has pioneered a new breed of an American eatery where imaginative food and wine are accompanied by gracious hospitality, comfortable surroundings, and outstanding value. Together, the restaurants of Passion Food Hospitality have topped dining lists ranging from *Bon Appétit* [Favorite Places, DC Coast] to *Esquire* [Best New Restaurants, Acadiana, DC Coast, and PassionFish]; an award particularly dear to David's heart was the 2008 RAMMY recognizing Passion Food Hospitality's Wine & Beverage Program as best of the year according to the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington. In 2005 David and his partners were recognized by *Washingtonian Magazine* as Restaurateurs of the Year and, in 2014 and 2015, they were named RAMMY Award Finalists for Restaurateurs of the Year.

Says David, "I honestly have to say that I feel like I haven't worked a day since I left my last job...that's just how much I love coming to the restaurants every day."

For more information:

Simone Rathlé | 703.534.8102

president | simoneink, llc

simone@simoneink.com

simoneink.com | blog – deepfrieddiaries.com



Chef Jeff Tunks Makes Gastronomic Waves

Chef Jeff Tunks is one of the best and brightest in the ever-growing constellation of great American chefs. There are few who possess as much confidence, extended experience, business acumen, and as deep a passion for simply prepared seasonal foods. Underneath a six-foot-three exterior in chef whites is a man with the soul of an artist, the passion of a perfectionist, and an unquestionable devotion to running a top-notch kitchen.

Like many in his field, Tunks attended the Culinary Institute of America; unlike many, however, Tunks received the prestigious Frances L. Roth Award for outstanding performance. From there, he served an externship under Dean Ferring at the Veranda Club in Atlanta, transferring with him to the Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas, where Tunks worked at Mistral, a sister restaurant on the complex. There he met his mentor, the classically French-trained chef Takashi Shirmaizu. It was under Shirmaizu's tutelage that Tunks was introduced to the idea that at the foundation of every great dish must be superior ingredients and solid cooking techniques. Additionally, Shirmaizu's Eastern influence on Western cuisine became the base for Tunks' cooking.

Tunks first landed in the nation's capital in 1987, having been recruited as opening executive chef at the popular River Club Restaurant in Georgetown, where he experimented with varied dishes of the Mid-Atlantic. In 1991 he ventured west to the luxury seaside resort Loew's Coronado Bay, where he used the riches of the Pacific to his advantage at the award-winning Azzura Point. Tunks' next challenge was yet again coastal, this time the Gulf coast. At The Grill Room at the Windsor Court Hotel in New Orleans, Tunks secured a "Best Restaurant" rating from *Gourmet* in 1997 and earned five Mobil stars for the Grill Room, the highest marks bestowed by the association. The Grill Room was the only new culinary establishment that year to be so honored.

Shortly after securing the Mobil rating, Tunks decided it was time to go it alone, taking a team of talented chefs with him from New Orleans. With the opening of DC Coast in June of 1998, Tunks created the perfect stage for his distinctive cuisine. Showcasing ingredients indigenous to the tri-coastal areas, Tunks developed a modern American cuisine all his own. A success from the outset, DC Coast has garnered outstanding reviews from *Gourmet* (one of the top 5 restaurants in Washington), *Bon Appétit*, *Food & Wine*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Wine Spectator*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. Tunks' succulent crab cakes are perennially ranked the city's best, in a town that considers the crab cake its particular specialty. In August 2000, Tunks and his partners launched TenPenh, where they delighted diners with Southeast Asian-inspired cuisine for 11 years until it closed in 2011. *Bon Appétit*, *Gourmet*, *Wine Spectator*, *The Washington Post*, *Washingtonian*, *Departures*, and *Travel + Leisure* all praised TenPenh during its time. September 2003 saw the rise of yet another side of Tunks' culinary passions, Latin American and Caribbean fare, with the opening of Ceiba restaurant, which continued to sizzle for more than a decade until its closing fall of 2014. Amid great anticipation, in September 2005, Tunks launched Acadiana, featuring modern interpretations of Louisiana fish house classics, a cuisine dear to his heart since his years in New Orleans. It has been named one of The Top 20 Restaurants in America (2006) by *Esquire Magazine*. In October 2008, Tunks crossed the Potomac to open PassionFish in

Reston, Virginia, ten years after he and his partners opened the doors to their first restaurant. PassionFish is the next generation, twenty-first century rendition of DC Coast, taking its tri-coastal seafood theme to a global level – and has been hailed by *Esquire*, *Food Arts*, and *The Washington Post*. As national critic John Mariani put it, “if you live nearby, you are very lucky indeed to have a place of this caliber.” As of 2011, Jeff Tunks was able to place his name and innovative ideas behind two new restaurants—District Commons and Burger, Tap & Shake—sister concepts that highlight fine American cuisine and a variety of casual but high-quality burgers, fries, and shakes (respectively). In early 2012, Jeff Tunks and his partners opened the doors to their next venture – Fuego Cocina y Tequilera – a temple of authentic Mexican cuisine serving robust, fresh and traditional dishes finely tuned to the technique-driven quality that Tunks is known for. In August 2014, the dynamic trio opened their latest venture: Penn Commons – a sportier, industrial chic all-American tavern in the Chinatown / Penn Quarter neighborhood of DC just next to the bustling area, Verizon Center. Penn Commons is the sleek second branch of its sister restaurant District Commons in Foggy Bottom. 2015 saw two new restaurant openings: a second BTS in the DC's Tenleytown neighborhood, and a second PassionFish located in Bethesda, MD.

Tunks was named Chef of the Year 2003-2004 by the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington; and was a finalist in 2014 and 2015, for their RAMMY Award along with his partners in the category of Restaurateurs of the Year. He is listed in *The International Who's Who of Chefs*. *Washingtonian* magazine named Tunks and his partners Restaurateurs of the Year in 2005. He is currently Chair of the Southern Food & Beverage Museum. In recent years, Tunks has taken on that occupational hazard of chefs everywhere – excess weight gain – making his loss of over 100 pounds both a personal health triumph and a public service, making appearances on *The Today Show*, numerous local television news programs, in countless articles, and even cooking classes at his restaurants demonstrating how to cook and eat healthfully.

But let it not be said that one chef is an island. Tunks knows how to build a team to his best advantage. Over the years, his vision and good sense has created a diverse group of chefs who have helped him forge ahead with his dream projects: Chris Clime, Executive Chef at PassionFish, has been with Tunks at both DC Coast and TenPenh, and was the Chef de Cuisine who opened Ceiba and Acadiana. Brant Tesky, Executive Chef at Acadiana, worked with Clime and Tunks to help open Acadiana as the restaurant's sous chef; and lastly, Alfredo Solis whose Mexican heritage helped guide the inspiration and menu development for Fuego Cocina y Tequileria.

One chef, nine unique culinary concepts; a satisfied Tunks can ride his wave.

For more information:

Simone Rathlé—703.534.8102

simone@simonezez.com

www.simonezez.com

www.twitter.com/simoneink