

Jennifer Backman

Weekapaug Inn



PBN PHOTO/MICHAEL SALERNO

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Whether it's hand-formed tortelloni or a simple vegetable presentation, executive chef Jennifer Backman, 34, focuses on inventiveness at the Weekapaug Inn in Westerly.

The care and attention involved in leading a team that swells from six to 20 in peak season is what drives the Seattle native.

"When the season is evolving around you, it's about integrating those things into the menu," she noted. "Seasonality is critical. You might have heirloom tomatoes and early-winter squash at the same time. If you're doing it right, you're actually offering a menu that highlights both of those things."

Backman followed a steady path to her current position. She earned a bachelor of science degree in culinary arts in 2003, and worked at Castle Hill in Newport for nearly seven years. In 2010, she became sous chef at Ocean House and executive sous chef in early 2012. Her arrival at Weekapaug Inn as executive chef coincided with its reopening in October 2012.

Feeding people and, through food, allowing them to relive classic dishes and holiday traditions are what keep Backman going.

"It's a very emotional experience, to cook for someone," she said. "When you see them smile and

experience it, it's instant gratification." n

Favorite dish to make: Braised beef shanks and risotto with garlic bread

Dining when not cooking: Anywhere outside in the summertime, so I can relax

Most admired living chef: Patrick O'Connell, Inn at Little Washington, Washington, Va.

Why Rhode Island? Working at some beautiful properties, I fell in love with the state