

Brandon E. Chrostowski

Brandon Edwin Chrostowski is on a mission to change the face of re-entry in the United States. In 2007, he founded EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute. His belief that “every human being regardless of their past has the right to a fair and equal future” is what has driven the creation of EDWINS. The idea for EDWINS was born from a ‘break’ that Chrostowski received early in life and has grown into a six-month program conducted at EDWINS Restaurant in Cleveland, Ohio as well as in prison. His approach is simple: arm those re-entering society with a skill set and a smile. The program provides training in Culinary Arts and the Hospitality Industry. Individuals are not only equipped with basic culinary skills, but also are assisted with finding employment and have the opportunity to utilize free housing, basic medical care, clothing, job coaching, and literacy programs.

Chrostowski began his career in Detroit sixteen years ago and has since trained in some of the world’s finest restaurants. He received an Associate’s degree in Culinary Arts and a Bachelor’s degree in Business and Restaurant Management at The Culinary Institute of America. He apprenticed at Chicago’s legendary restaurant, Charlie Trotters and after graduation worked at Lucas Carton, Paris’ longest standing Michelin 3-star restaurant. At Lucas Carton, Brandon began to develop cutting-edge skills, while learning the intricacies of a French kitchen.

After spending time in Europe, Brandon decided to return to the United States to refine further what he learned in France. In New York City, Brandon worked at Le Cirque, Picholine, Chanterelle, a New York Times and James Beard award-winning restaurant, while working under the tutelage of restaurateurs Karen and David Waltuck. At Chanterelle, Brandon also worked closely with Master Sommelier Roger Dagorn and was so inspired became a certified sommelier himself.

Leaving New York to start EDWINS in Cleveland was the next step. A city with high incarceration and poverty with a strong desire for innovative re-entry programming was the place to be. In 2011, the program began in prison and in 2013 the restaurant and institute opened its doors in Cleveland. Brandon’s commitment to EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute has grown from teaching in prisons to opening its flagship restaurant as well as building a 20,000-square foot campus that offers free housing, a workout facility, library, basketball court and other amenities. Today EDWINS Leadership and Restaurant Institute graduates over 100 students a year between its prison program and restaurant institute.

Chrostowski’s philosophy is simple, “make it happen”. No matter what the problem is, it can be solved with hard work and care. This approach has led to the success of EDWINS and a revolution in the non profit world. Issues from housing, healthcare and substance abuse treatment are all addressed while at EDWINS. Graduates of the program have gained employment in Cleveland’s finest restaurants after finishing the program or after release from prison. The results have been astounding 97% employment after graduation and 1% recidivism.

The success of this work and other initiatives led by Chrostowski has earned him over dozens of awards including the 2016 CNN Hero, The Richard Cornuelle Award from the Manhattan Institute for Social Entrepreneurship as well as Crain’s 40 under 40. He has spoken at a number of Universities and corporations but is most proud of his TED X talk, his speech at The United States Senate and The City Club. Fighting for fair and equal opportunities has also earned Chrostowski media from countless outlets such as The New York Times, Washington Post, The City Journal, Forbes, Food & Wine, The Irish Times, HR Magazine, The Cleveland Plain Dealer and more. He has also been featured on Steve Harvey as a Harvey’s Hero, TD Jakes, CNN, NBC, ABC, NPR, WKSU, The Huckabee Show and is the subject of the 2018 Oscar nominated documentary, “*Knife Skills*” by Thomas Lennon. In 2018, Brandon was invited to cook at the illustrious James Beard House in NYC. He was named a Place Maker by the Cleveland Foundation, Innovator of The Year by the Ohio Restaurant Association and was awarded the Economic Diversity Award by the Cleveland Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Brandon, a committed advocate of the underserved, was so upset with the condition of Cleveland and its leadership in the inner city that he ran for Mayor in the 2017 election, finishing fourth out of nine candidates in the primary, surprising many in the political class. Brandon is a proud father of two, Leo and Lilly and is crazy about his wife Catana!