



*The rhythm*  
of seasons

Running a remote resort kitchen takes plenty of planning

BY LAWRENCE HERZOG

**Tyler Leeson**, executive chef, who runs one of British Columbia's remote restaurant kitchens, The Kingfisher Restaurant, part of the Halcyon Hot Springs Village & Spa.



**E**xecutive chef Tyler Leeson runs one of British Columbia's remote restaurant kitchens. The Kingfisher Restaurant is part of the Halcyon Hot Springs Village & Spa, a 32-kilometre drive from the nearest town of Nakusp, and 68 kilometres and a ferry ride from the Trans-Canada Highway at Revelstoke. Business at the resort peaks in the summer and around the Christmas holidays, then drops off dramatically during the languid days of October and November.

There's a rhythm to life in these Kootenay mountains that Leeson adores, and he figures the place is in his blood for good. "I grew up in this part of the province, and I remember coming here with my parents. It was just a little dirt road off the highway to a wooden tub, but they loved coming to these hot springs. What a place – peaceful, calm, invigorating."

Indeed, folks have been coming to the healing waters of Halcyon for at least six generations to soak away their cares, far from the frantic pace of the world. The modern village and spa opened 10 years ago, complete with new pools, accommodations and the restaurant, with a spectacular view over Arrow Lake and the Monashee Mountains.

"New business does not generally look to this area of the province because of the extreme seasonality," notes Uli Lehnert, a GFS district sales representative for the Kootenays. "But those who do come to invest and build do so out of a genuine love and enthusiasm for living in this area's unique blend of scenic beauty and escapism lifestyle."

It's Chef Leeson's goal to make the food at the 45-seat Kingfisher Restaurant and its 20-seat patio as jaw-droppingly good as the views and the facilities. "I'm all about freshness and quality. I don't believe in cutting corners, and going the extra mile makes all the difference. People are looking for quality, and it's up to us to deliver."

Deliver he does, with popular offerings including ginger beef crafted from certified Angus strip loin, pan-seared with a honey soy ginger glaze and topped with fresh cilantro. Another big seller is the cold smoked wild sockeye salmon, marinated in maple syrup chili flakes and fresh tarragon, and accompanied by an arugula and walnut salad. He

watches price points carefully and has just pared some of them to answer the demand from an ever more price-sensitive clientele. Lunch selections range from \$12 to \$16, while dinner entrées are priced from \$20 to \$36.

Leeson's Mediterranean-influenced cooking is giving way to what he calls a more West Coast Canadian style to reflect the spirit of the setting. Far from the beaten path and challenged by an irregular business pattern, he still makes it his mission to buy regional ingredients whenever possible, like cap-sicum Gouda cheese from a producer

in nearby Cherryville. "Using local is a way to thank your neighbours for their business by giving them some of our business. That way, everybody wins."

November is the resort's quietest month, he reports, but it's getting better every year. "We're doing as much as we can to drive traffic in the off-season through advertising and special events. The biggest struggle with that in the kitchen is just trying to stay fresh, especially with the protein. We've got to think ahead, and plan everything a week in advance. I use my numbers from the previous year as a starting point and base my orders on that."

The restaurant has a six-person core staff, and Leeson carefully builds pride and ownership in his team. "I give them input on the operation of the restaurant and the menu." The upswing into peak season means everybody gets more hours in the summer, and short-term hires help with the volumes from early July to the end of September. **yfm**



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**Think ahead, plan in advance,** track volumes carefully and use last year's numbers where possible.

**Empower your core team,** involve them in operations, hire people who understand the fluctuations in hours.

**Buy local ingredients wherever possible** and turn those producers into customers.

**Cover the demands of busiest times** by hiring supplementary staff who are happy to be temporary.



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