

Calgary's Chefs

Chef in Profile:

Justin Labossiere, Corporate Executive Chef

Restaurant: Sky 360

One of the most anticipated restaurant openings in Calgary for 2008 was the Sky 360 in one of Calgary's most popular landmarks, the Calgary Tower. Diners to the restaurant were greeted with a beautiful contemporary interior, waived 'elevation' fees and a mouth-watering menu offering local Canadian fare with a flair.

The restaurant, now run by the Concorde Entertainment Group, is part of a highly successful group of restaurants including the Whiskey Night Club, Flames Central, The Bungalow and Mercury Lounge. Say goodbye to your memories of the old Panorama restaurant and prepare to be wowed with the new menu and ambience.

Overseeing all the Concorde Group's restaurants is corporate executive chef, Justin Labossiere. Labossiere got his start in the kitchen 10 years ago by working in local restaurants when he was putting himself through school.

"I was doing business administration at SAIT and paid my bills by cooking at restaurants," says Labossiere. "Then I lost interest in business administration and fell into cooking full time."

Labossiere has an impressive resumé including restaurants such as the Sooke Harbour House near Victoria, B.C., Catch and Il Sogno in Calgary. His past experiences with various cuisines can be seen in the creativity of his menu plans.

"With Sky 360, the plan for the menu was not to reinvent the wheel but to offer a great experience that keeps people coming back," he says. "The menu is for everyone – kids, weddings, business – with contemporary Canadian cuisine using local ingredients."

Roasted butternut squash soup, Rocky Mountain game platter and pan-seared Alberta beef tenderloin are just some of the comfort foods on the menu that will have you coming back to relax, enjoy the view and savour.

With a year under his belt as corporate executive chef with the Concorde Group, Labossiere finds his position has occasional challenges but it's where he loves to be.

"Being a corporate chef has so many layers, it's really exciting because I'm doing something different all the time," says Labossiere. "But building the right teams is tough; there aren't a lot of skilled trades so you have to be creative with staffing. It's so enjoyable to build the right team and see it be successful."

Like most chefs, Labossiere has some favourite ingredients he likes to work with.

"I love local produce in the summer, it's great, and, for



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meat, pork is my favourite thing to work with," he says. "I also have a long history as a pastry chef so I love working with vanilla."

This year Labossiere looks forward to a few new challenges. The Concorde Group is hoping to open multiple venues in 2009 that will add to the challenge of finding more staff. Labossiere figures that 75 per cent of his work will be focused on pure development with the rest of his time ensuring the existing venues continue with their ongoing success. During Stampede, three venues alone will seat 5,000 people per day. Combine that with staffing shortages and suddenly creativity becomes an important factor.

"We're going to focus on being innovative in technique," he says. "In other words, how we get our product to the plate." **BIC**