

CEO Chef Fact Sheet

Key Facts

- Jim Connolly started culinary team building in 1994 as "Jim Connolly and Associates Teambuilders"
- Jim was Chef de Cuisine at the Zagat Guide rated Emile's Restaurant in San Jose, CA for 17 years prior to forming "Jim Connolly and Associates Teambuilders"
- "Team Cuisine, Inc." incorporated in November 2005
- "Team Cuisine, Inc." changed its name to "CEO Chef, Inc." in March of 2007 to more closely reflect the mission and vision of the company.
- Corporate Culinary Challenge™ is the flagship program CEO Chef offer. The challenge is for the entire group to create a gourmet buffet worthy of a five star restaurant in under 2 hours.
- 2008 marked an increase in clients looking for meeting planning services to assist in finding a facility to host their meeting conference that included our culinary team building program. Renee Gordon who has operated as our in-house event planner, expanded her role to accommodate this need to locate, negotiate and organize our clients conference.
- With the increase in popularity of television shows like "Iron Chef" and "Top Chef", CEO Chef saw the need to offer a competitive version or all our programs as well as retaining the cooperative versions too.
- The focus of all CEO Chef programs is on the participants program or training needs, not on the food (that's the focus of the participants).
- CEO Chef can handle group sizes from 8 participants to over 500.
- Program duration ranges from 1 hour to multi-day
- In 2010 CEO Chef launched a new division that acknowledged the growing need for "Culinary Entertainment". With the growing interest in America in fine food, wine and dining, companies, groups and professional organizations are looking for entertaining learning opportunities for their members and attendees.

History

CEO Chef has provided interactive, fun and engaging culinary team building programs and culinary hospitality entertainment to thousands of participants in hundreds of companies from start-ups to Fortune 100's throughout North America since 1994.

Jim Connolly, Chef de Cuisine of a Silicon Valley Zagat Guide top rated restaurant, began by offering corporate cooking classes to clients and their business teams. As class popularity grew, Jim left the restaurant and "Jim Connolly and Associates Team Builders" was formed to focus more closely on this growing market. Jim also improved his knowledge of team and leadership dynamics through continuing education, including coaching certification from Anthony Robbins and Associates.

The vision expanded as Jim realized it was business facilitators and coaches, not chefs, who make the best culinary team building program leaders. This led Jim to join forces in 1999 with Carol Cole-Lewis, whose education and corporate background was useful in refining and systemizing the program and company.

Renee Gordon, an expert in client relationship development, joined the executive team in July of 2000.

CEO Chef became a corporation in November 2005.

The original "TeamCuisine" program was developed because Jim recognized his customers required more than a cooking class to build a team – they needed an activity where clients could learn serious business lessons in a fun and playful setting, and not just how to cook.

In January 2007, CEO Chef's "Corporate Culinary Challenge™" replaced TeamCuisine as CEO Chef's flagship program. Corporate Culinary Challenge™ builds upon the leadership and team building experiences of TeamCuisine. Program participants are divided into teams of 6 to 8, with each team given the guidelines and materials for a Culinary Challenge they must complete in 2 hours. Teams' results are grouped together to create a sumptuous gourmet buffet banquet rivaling a 5 star restaurant. A final debrief ties together lessons learned through the culinary activity to the business world.

In November 2007, CEO Chef introduced the "Corporate Hospitality Challenge". This interactive culinary entertainment program addresses the need for trade show hospitality room hosts to provide guests with a first class engaging and interactive culinary experience.

In January 2008, CEO Chef introduced 4 new menus for the "Corporate Culinary Challenge" to provide additional choices for repeat customers.

Also introduced in 2008 was an event planning department, headed by Vice President of Client Relations, Renee Gordon.

Group sizes from 8 to over 500 people presently enjoy CEO Chef programs. These programs are not restricted to a kitchen, as conference and meeting room space are quickly adapted for use.

In 2010, CEO Chef introduced a new division of the company that focused on "Culinary Entertainment". The focus within this new division filled the need for company, organization and group requests for more live entertainment for their attendees personal development and interest in the area of food, cooking, wine and dining.

Biographies

Jim Connolly, CEO and Founder

An unstoppable attitude and belief that every team has the ability to overcome any obstacle, Jim Connolly has helped transform over 40,000 people into dynamic, cohesive, action-oriented team members.

Chef Jim has created one of a kind keynote speeches and team building programs that touch the hearts and stomachs of some of America's top companies, which is why he's been called, "America's Top Team Building Chef!"

His programs are the only one of its kind that are designed by a world class, celebrity Chef who is also an experienced corporate trainer.

Birth of an Team Building Chef

The heart of a team building/leader developed on the basketball courts of Providence, RI where before Chef Jim considered a culinary career. Jim would regularly play on the "challenge" courts of Providence choosing to form teams from players of average or less skills knowing that if they choose to play together, that their teamwork would overcome even the All-Stars of the playgrounds.

Well that attitude and belief in the process of team carried on throughout Jim's careers, starting with years of working with top hotels and restaurants throughout the country as a journeymen cook. He committed his efforts to being the best he could be and immersed himself in books and classes at his alumni, Johnson & Wales University (where he graduated with honors!). But it wasn't until he met one of his mentors, Gus Riedi of La Bonne Auberge Restaurant, that he really understood how to effectively lead a kitchen and elevate a kitchen team's performance to world-class.

Up the Game

Jim put those hard lessons of kitchen leadership to test when he joined the team at Emile's Restaurant & Cooking School, where he met his second mentor, Emile Mooser. As popular as this restaurant was, Chef Jim's future business partner and restaurant proprietor, Emile Mooser, empowered Jim to take the restaurant to the next level which became the top restaurant in Silicon Valley for the 17 1/2 years during Chef Jim's reign.

During this time, he elevated the quality of the restaurant to become one of the top five restaurants in food for the whole San Francisco Bay area, according to Zagat guide. As well as being a yearly recipient of the DIRoNA Award (Distinguished Restaurants of North America) top 100 and as one of the very few Gault Millau award winners for outstanding dining in America. And was honored as a guest chef at the American culinary mecca, the James Beard House. But Chef Jim's most valued accomplishment was the development of future hospitality leaders. Employees that were promoted up the ladder, some from entry level positions as dishwashers and bus boys, to leave as highly skilled Maitre d' hotel and fine Chef's in their own right.

A New Chapter

These years of balancing his time leading his restaurant, teaching in his cooking schools, taping his cooking shows lead him to expand his leadership skills to a whole new level. This is where he meet his next mentor, Ron Cole of Advanced Productivity Solutions, who opened up his mind and emotions to a whole new level of leadership master and his first introduction to NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) communication skills (which Chef Jim later became a practitioner). After this first taste of highly sophisticated advanced training, the training and learning flood gates opened and took him to completing Mastery University and Train the Trainer with Tony Robbins, Art and Science of Corporate Coaching and the Art and Science of Group Dynamics with Michael Grinder and numerous other training programs in organizational development.

This is where Chef Jim successfully blended together his hospitality and culinary skills along with his corporate training skills to create CEO Chef, Inc. the premier cooking team building and leadership development program in the U.S.

Chef Jim has had the good fortune to work with some of America's top companies in the area of team building and leadership development like: Google, Disney, NBC/Universal, Hewlett Packard, Sun Microsystems, Discovery Communications, Amgen, Aramark, Southern California Edison, National University and many more.

Chef Jim and his company continue to be recognized as leaders in their industry from fine publications like American West Magazine, California CEO, Team & Leadership Quarterly, Business Journal, San Francisco Chronicle, San Jose Mercury, Meeting Professionals International and more.

He continues to stretch his influence in building relationships through food and cooking with his reoccurring appearance on the nationally syndicated Dr. Phil show, "The Doctors", as well as his upcoming series on the Bravo Channel, "Troubled Couples". And has authored two books, "French Tapas" and "Recipe to Your Team Success".

What's Next

The remainder of 2009 and the year 2010 are soon becoming a fulfilling and creative time. The unstoppable Chef Jim Connolly has left and continues to leave his mark on the hearts, minds and stomachs of America's top corporate teams and leaders. And if he has anything to do with it, bring the world together, one meal at a time.

Renee Gordon, President

Renee Gordon came to CEO Chef at the turn of the millennium from her extensive background in corporate catering, high end gift basket development for the entertainment industry and specialized event planning. Her career path has been as varied as her interests, from commercial real estate development with Donald Trump in Australia to former spokes person and model for Sheido products and cosmetics in Japan to specialized event planning in Beverly Hills.

Her original responsibilities with CEO Chef was as our in-house hotel coordinator and event planner and has expanded her role as President of CEO Chef in charge of operations and client relations. She especially enjoys helping clients find the right facility to host their meeting, conference or retreat and help them set the tone so our clients experience the maximum benefit of their time together.

Her international flair is originally reflected from her upbringing in both Hawaii, Los Angeles and New York as well as her extensive travel in Europe, China and Japan. This varied background has benefited her CEO Chef clients, whose attendees come from all corners of the globe. So her understanding of their backgrounds and culture has contributed to the success of their meetings and conferences.

Her education is just as varied as her life experiences. She is a graduate of the Cordon Bleu School of Cooking in Paris, Otis Parsons College of Design in

New York, Business and Real Estate School in Los Angeles as well as a graduate of CEO Chef's corporate train-the-trainer program.

She currently resides in the Los Angeles area accompanied by her many animal friends, 58 birds, hundreds of tropical fish and Koi, a 5 pound toy poodle named Jean-Luc and a 110 pound Russian Wolf Hound who answers to "Lord Bentley". Renee is currently laying the ground work to fulfill her girlhood dream of creating a dog, cat and bird sanctuary called "Tails and Feathers".

She a member of Meeting Professional International (MPI), and involved in many organizations that assist in the advancement of women in business like Soroptimist International, Women's Food Service Forum, Brave Heart Women Global Community, NAWBO (National Association of Women Business Owners) and Assistance League of San Fernando Valley She has also been a committee member of Cystic Fibrosis of Los Angeles. An is honored to being a lifetime member of the Order of Eastern Star.

Suggested Questions

What's the difference between a culinary team building and a cooking class?
Why are CEO Chef programs more effective than other culinary team buildings?
Why is a culinary team building so effective?
What are some of the skills participants learn through a CEO Chef program?
How is CEO Chef different from other companies offering culinary team building?
What are some stories you can tell us about CEO Chef programs – lessons learned, funny experiences, etc.
Why are programs like CEO Chef's so important for a company to invest in?
Why are CEO Chef programs so beneficial to its hotel and winery partners?
How can CEO Chef handle so many participants?
Why is corporate team building training so important to the growth of any company?

Articles and Appearances

The Meeting Professional – December 2007 "Does the Belly Rule the Mind?" by Gary Tufel
San Fernando Valley Business Journal – Aug 20, 2007 "Cooking Up Teamwork" by Rosanna Woo
Johnson and Wales Magazine–Winter 2001 "Execs and Techs Build Consensus Mixing Mousse" by Rebecca Zakin
San Jose Mercury News West Magazine–April 20, 1997, "Ovenward Bound" by Joyce Gemperlein
America West Magazine–December 1999, "Executive Chef" by Jacki Vaughn