

Bringing The Hospitality Industry Into The Hospital

An Interview with Bruno Bazin Tison, Vice President, Systems Food Services and Corporate Executive Chef, Northwell Health

EDITORS' NOTE Chef Bruno Tison is the Vice President of Food Services and Corporate Executive Chef within Northwell Health's Office of Patient and Customer Experience. Committed to delivering a world-class food experience for Northwell's patients, and building a healthy workplace for employees, Tison is responsible for promoting consistency and elevating the quality of food and beverage throughout the expansive organization. As a 30+ year hospitality industry veteran that



Bruno Bazin Tison

includes Executive Chef of the legendary Plaza Hotel in New York City, Tison's nouvelle cuisine has earned extensive critical acclaim. Tison comes to Northwell from the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa in California – a Condé Nast "Top Ten" rated spa and resort. There he successfully led the team in receiving the celebrated Michelin Star recognition for three consecutive years. Prior to joining the Plaza Hotel, Tison trained with several of France's legendary master chefs including Bernard Waterlot, Roger Verge, Michel Guerard, and Alain Chapel. He also worked in some of America's most prestigious kitchens in New York City as well as San Francisco, such as Ernie's Restaurant and Pierre at Le Meridien, Alain Chapel's first venture in the United States. A native of northern France, Tison began his culinary education at Belgium's prestigious Institut Technique Des Metiers De L'Alimentation, where he graduated with highest honors and was awarded first prize for excellence in culinary achievement. Tison is also a member of the Société Culinaire Philantropique in New York City.

What excited you about the opportunity to join Northwell Health and made you feel it was the right fit?

I felt that the opportunity to redefine food in healthcare was an amazing challenge which is something that I had been looking for in my career. I was in the hotel and restaurant industry for over 35 years, working in Michelin 3-star restaurants and 5-star hotels and resorts, and cooking for celebrities. I worked for people who were able to afford my style of cooking, which was for a very exclusive clientele, but I always thought about how I could help the community and serve people who could not afford to eat well. I wanted to give joy to the

people who were in the most need of it, and Northwell Health provided the opportunity to cook great food for patients during a difficult time in their lives, and to make a difference on a large scale since Northwell has 21 hospitals and is the largest healthcare provider and private employer in New York State.

Was it challenging to change the mentality around food, service, and hospitality in healthcare?

I want to be transparent – this was a challenge. The truth is that in healthcare the food and the service of the food was never looked at as an asset; it was looked at as a cost. When I started on this journey, there were people who did not believe that what we were doing was important or that it would work, which is something I expected. I looked at it as an opportunity to show people the importance of food in healthcare and to prove the value it would create. It's about creating a new culture around food and nutrition in healthcare and making sure that culture and that vision goes through the entire system.

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I started recruiting top chefs from around the world who had never worked in a hospital kitchen but knew how to use fresh ingredients to create healthy, made-to-order dishes. We

also upgraded the kitchens and partnered with the hospitals' dieticians so the new staff could produce a range of culturally diverse meals – from Asian to Latin American to Kosher – with all the nutritional requirements for patients and their various treatment plans.

Northwell does amazing things every day for its patients in regard to the treatment of illness and providing high-quality healthcare, and it was my responsibility to bring our food, and the service of the food, to those same standards. I knew that Michael Dowling, the CEO of Northwell, and the management team were supportive in this effort and would provide what was needed for me to drive change. I have been here for almost seven years, and while change can take time, we have made great strides in our food offering and how we provide service and hospitality at Northwell.

How are you able to provide consistent quality and service at all of Northwell's hospitals?

I visit a hospital every week personally, and I test the food and meet regularly with our executive chefs and the entire team. I need to be at the hospitals with my teams to get a true feeling of what is happening and how we are performing. With my 35 years of experience in hotels and restaurants, I can tell just by walking into a kitchen from the vibe and smell and looks on the faces of the staff whether the food is going to be good. Regarding service, when I see a member of our team delivering food to a patient and looking in the patient's eyes, giving them a smile, asking them how they are doing, if they are enjoying the food – this is how I can see if we are delivering on our service promise. My focus is on bringing the hospitality industry into the hospital.

When you look at the success that you have achieved transforming Northwell's food service, are you able to take moments to reflect on what you have accomplished?

I enjoy so much what I am doing – it doesn't feel like work. While I am focused on what is next and am always looking at our food quality (86 percent) and service scores (54 percent) which are now the highest ever at Northwell, when you receive a letter from a patient saying that you helped change their life and provided something that they never expected in a hospital, it is a special feeling. There is nothing more fulfilling than having the opportunity to touch someone's life and make a difference – that is the true meaning of joy. ●