

# Meals get star treatment at retirement complex

## *Chef with fine-dining background takes over kitchen at Tapestry*

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**W**hen visiting a seniors' facility, would you expect to find a restaurant serving first-class fare?

If you walked into Tapestry at Village Gate West, that's exactly what you would find.

Tapestry is a retirement living community that opened in Etobicoke this past April. It's changing the face of retirement living by helping its residents to live out their golden years in convenience and comfort – and with quality cuisine.

Tapestry is being hailed as being "a new approach" to the traditional seniors' residence by providing services and food comparable to a five-star resort.

Michael Howell is the head chef at Tapestry, responsible for creating the menu and the meals for the residents. However much he loves his job today, Howell admitted he was a bit skeptical when it was first offered to him.

An award-winning chef with a résumé that includes working at fine-dining establishments in Toronto like Auberge de Pommier and Moishes Steak House, Howell said the prospect of working at a seniors' residence didn't have the same appeal at first.

"When people usually think of retirement homes they think steam-table cuisine, so it was a tremendous challenge for

me to come up with concepts that work, and deliver first-class food in this environment, but I kind of fell in love with the whole idea," he said.

Howell's menus change seasonally and he's always coming up with new dishes to serve as the daily special. He makes everything from scratch and uses fresh ingredients to make a variety of cuisine from which the residents can choose.

"It's a blend of international flavour because we have people with many different backgrounds," he said. "I also try to blend together heart-healthy selections and fried foods... the selections change a lot."

This means residents can have everything from the basics like homemade chicken fingers and fries to a gourmet dish like salmon gravlax with baby lettuce and a sweet mustard dressing.

Howell said he's had a lot of positive comments about his food by the residents, but he also appreciates that unlike in a restaurant, he sees the people he cooks for on a regular basis and enjoys the interaction.

Rosalie Kiner has been a Tapestry resident since May, and had this to say of Howell: "He is my friend, he's the greatest guy in the city, he's very nice and his food is top-notch."

The 73-year-old, who has to use a walker and is not steady on her feet, said she loves that she can go downstairs to eat, and the food is so fantastic, she eats in the dining

hall regularly, alone and with family.

With a background in the hotel business herself, Kiner said she's a good judge of service and quality.

"The food is like a five-star hotel – that says enough about it."

Tapestry general manager Cathy Wallbank said the restaurant dining experience is a completely new concept in retirement living in Ontario.

"They have a \$400-a-month meal credit they utilize in the restaurant... some of them are here for breakfast, lunch and dinner, some just for dinner, but it really gives them the choice to do what they want to do when they want to do it," Wallbank said.

And she has heard nothing but good things about the food, so much so that when families come to visit, she said they often prefer to stay there and dine on Howell's food than eat elsewhere.

"The calibre of the food we're providing here, you wouldn't get at one of our competitors," Wallbank said, adding the quality extends from the restaurant through the rest of the complex.

"When you walk in it's granite countertop, front desk, concierge sitting right there, the whole feel is comfortable," she said. "You get that service feel right off the top, you don't feel the least bit like you're walking into an institution, you feel like you're walking into a five-star resort."

Kiner said besides the great service, the



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**Chef Michael Howell at The Tapestry at Village Gate West serves a dessert to resident Rosalie Kiner.**

staff is extremely kind.

"If everybody could afford it, then everybody should be able to live like this," Kiner said.

"Everybody who's getting older and you know that you have a certain amount of time left over, God should be good to all of us and this is the way we should live."