

VISIT McCALL

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Your Regional Visitors Guide for New Meadows, McCall, Donnelly, and Cascade, Idaho



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A Chef's Life

How resident chefs are using their unique experiences to shape the flavor of local cuisine

By McKenzie Kraemer

Chef Marcus Stewart | Shore Lodge & Whitetail

A nail in the finger was the nail in the coffin for Chef Marcus Stewart's construction career.

Growing up in South Carolina with grandparents who owned a large farm, Stewart always gravitated toward fresh food. Family members who lived nearby raised chickens, pigs and cattle. All that fresh produce and farm-raised livestock left a lasting impression and a love for quality ingredients. So did his father's involvement with the local Shriner's club and the delicious southern barbeque plates Stewart helped cook for fundraisers. That, and his grandmother, of course. "Having a southern grandma who cooked for 20 people every Sunday really meant that food was always our focal point, our gathering point," says Stewart.

That may have been why the move to the culinary arts was an easy fit following the nail gun experience. After high school, Stewart went to work at Landry's restaurants, first washing dishes then working his way up through the different stations. It was there he fell in love with the kitchen. "Trying to figure out how to make everything happen with 10 other people that you don't really know on a timeline because people are hungry," says Stewart. "It's an adrenaline rush."

From there, Stewart decided to pursue a more formal culinary education and attended Johnson and Wales University. This led him to work with Chef Frank McMahon at Hank's Seafood Restaurant in Charleston, named as one of Esquire's best new restaurants in 1998. He took part in extensive traveling opportunities throughout Germany with McMahan's brother, which eventually landed him on the Four Seasons team in Houston, Texas. Five years in Houston and two in Atlanta with the Four Seasons, rebranding and expanding restaurants,

culminated in a move to Hawaii. "I moved to Lanai as a chef tournant and within a year was the Executive Sous Chef overseeing two properties and the pastry department," says Stewart. He also credits his time in Hawaii as one of the best learning experiences of his career. "The cultural experience there is unsurpassed," he says. "There is so much exposure to global influences – Filipino cuisine, Pacific Rim cuisine, Japanese and Chinese cuisine."

After five and a half years with the Four Seasons in Hawaii, Stewart was ready to pursue another challenge. A move to Vail to rebrand three of the Four Seasons restaurants was just the change he had been looking for. It also catapulted him to a lofty goal – becoming the youngest Executive Chef within the Four Seasons company.





Photo courtesy Samantha Sals Photography

And that was when a friend told him about this little mountain town that served as home base for his Middle Fork trips. Curious, Stewart paid his friend a visit in the winter of 2019 – an intense snow year to say least. Undaunted by the towering tunnels of snow to get around town, Stewart found a new opportunity with Shore Lodge and Whitetail. “I was really intrigued by the membership aspect of Whitetail paired with the hotel experience of Shore Lodge,” says Stewart. “It provides a level of connection to the people you are serving that I haven’t found elsewhere.”

As the Executive Chef, Stewart oversees nine food and beverage outlets and a staff of 90. And he is thrilled. “It is the people in the kitchen, the chefs that are in place,” says Stewart, “all of us working together really create what the heart and soul of each restaurant is.” Building community, building connections through food; it seems Chef Stewart hasn’t quite given up on his construction career after all.

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What is your favorite thing to eat at YOUR restaurant?

At the Narrows, the Snake River Farms New York. At the Cutwater, the pizza, chicken or ribs – we have an amazing Yoder Smoker that we use to wood-fire, and it makes the flavor amazing.

What is your favorite ingredient to cook with?

I love seafood and shellfish.

What is something you love to make at home?

One of my favorite things is to bring home some of the amazing product we have access to in this industry. A great cut of yellowtail or salmon would be my go-to.

What is the first thing you remember cooking?

Barbecue. Barbeque is my thing. It is part of where I grew up – going to pick out your pig and processing it from pen to plate.