

BY TOM REALE

PHOTOS BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

# DEAN'S LIST

How many people, having heard that one of the duties of a gentleman's gentleman was to iron the daily paper for his employer, would think that being a butler was a dream job? Dean Radcliffe did, and as a young man he aspired to enter Ivor Spencer's school for butlers in London after he learned of its commitment to elegant service.

"I liked the idea of professional detail work and maintaining a professional demeanor at all times," he said. And although that particular dream didn't come true, Radcliffe, an instructor in the University of Alaska Anchorage culinary arts program, has managed to turn his commitment to service and hospitality into a stellar career.

You might expect that someone who once aspired to be a butler and teaches proper serving protocol would be a dour and somewhat forbidding guy. Not Radcliffe. At 45 years old and with graying hair that's revealing just a bit more forehead than it used to, Radcliffe exudes happiness. His metal-framed

glasses seem to magnify the perpetual twinkle in his eyes. Radcliffe has an easy, conversational tone when teaching his students and enlivens his lectures with personal asides and anecdotes. When speaking face-to-face, he's attentive and focused, and peppers his dialogue with laughter. He's a good audience for witty remarks, but one gets the feeling that his sense of discretion is always "on," and that the idea of betraying a confidence would never enter his mind.

It was Mary Smalley, the owner of the first yacht offering dinner cruises in the San Francisco Bay area in 1978, who first recognized Radcliffe's unique personality. Radcliffe was working for her as a prep cook and waiter at a waterfront restaurant. One day while making coffee he gazed out the restaurant window at a 68-foot Pacemaker motor yacht and wondered who the owner might be.

"Mary asked me what I was thinking about, and I told her I was just in awe of it. She told me if I was interested in working aboard to go to the chandlery and get a set of whites," Radcliffe said. "So, for the next eight years I worked for her, doing everything. ... I did marketing, sales, all of the food prepping. I

The culinary field  
has served this  
university instructor  
a colorful series  
of life events



sold the parties, planned the themes, etc. She took me under her wing and taught me everything. I thank God every day for having met this gracious woman.”

His days as chief steward aboard the yacht were adventurous and carefree. The Bee Gees once chartered the boat and at some point during the day singer Barry Gibb dared Radcliffe to take him water skiing in the shipping lanes. Soon afterward the U.S. Coast Guard, seeing no humor in their stunt, boarded their vessel. Despite Radcliffe’s efforts to impress the boarding officer with the fact

that those skiers were *the Bee Gees*, he was presented with a ticket. The tab came to either \$70 or \$500, depending on whether Radcliffe’s or Smalley’s memory is more accurate. Fortunately Gibb paid the fine and Radcliffe stayed in his employer’s good graces.

Radcliffe had his first experience with high-level security when the Shah of Iran chartered the boat to provide a day’s entertainment for his children, the prince and princess.

A security team, bomb-sniffing dogs and a scuba team scoured the yacht from top to bottom. Once the yacht was under way, Radcliffe, working in the galley, looked on either side of the boat and saw Coast Guard escort boats port and starboard, and in the background he heard the constant thumping of a helicopter overhead.

“I knew it was serious business, and I suddenly felt very vulnerable,” he said.

Attention to detail and never taking anything for granted are hallmarks of what might be termed the “Radcliffe Method.” When introducing himself to a new class at UAA, he stresses the need for people in the food-service business to be dependable—show up for work and show up on time. He preaches the values of organization, preparation, quality of service and professionalism.

Radcliffe said he learned an early les-

son on those values while working for Smalley during a trip to Mexico. She had taken the crew to Puerto Vallarta at Christmas to reward them for an especially busy December. While there, some crew members wanted to go deep-sea fishing. On the recommendation of the hotel concierge, Radcliffe chartered a fishing boat sight unseen, sent them on their trip and then relaxed for the day, happy to have taken good care of his co-workers.

But when they returned, they told a tale of seagoing woe. While Radcliffe expected the “fishing yacht” to be on a level of what he was used to at home, the vessel had a cabin made of rickety plywood. Everyone contracted “Montezuma’s Revenge” while onboard, the boat’s bathroom facilities consisted of honey buckets and they never even got to go fishing. Ever since, Radcliffe has learned to assume nothing, and tells his students to always check the details first-hand.

Radcliffe is pretty much a homegrown Alaskan. He’s lived here off and on since he was a year old, when his parents moved to a homestead near Homer. As a child he spent summers in Alaska and winters in California, and bounced back and forth most of his life. He has worked for Carr-Gottstein and many of the hotels in Anchorage, as well as provided catering and consulting services. He settled here in 1993 and married his wife, Susan, in 1997.

Radcliffe teaches courses in cost control, beverages, operations, human resource management, and hospitality and service. The past three years at the university have given him a chance to share his knowledge of the growing industry with students pursuing similar careers. He’s a leader now, but never forgets those first days as a waiter and cook. Last summer he worked as a waiter at the Snow Goose Restaurant and Sleeping Lady Brewery to reacquaint himself with the day-to-day stresses of providing quality service to the public.

“I was very glad to have this experience ‘back in the trenches.’ The job was all that I remember it to be, and more,” he said, rolling his eyes.

Radcliffe’s work has not gone unnoticed. The Anchorage chapter of the National Association of Catering Executives named him the on-premise caterer of the year for 2000, and he was



**Radcliffe had the opportunity** to meet the president and Hillary Clinton in 1994 when they visited Anchorage.



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fortunate enough to serve President and Mrs. Clinton when they visited Anchorage in 1994. He was working for Ultimate Catering when the Clintons arrived at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

“When the receiving line for local dignitaries formed, someone said ‘Dean you’ll never have the opportunity to meet the president again,’” Radcliffe said. “I thought, ‘Well heck, why not?’ I climbed up over the press box and got

in line between Greg Carr and Bill Sheffield. I met the president and when Hillary Clinton reached out to give me a hug, I pulled a camera out of my vest pocket and threw it out to Governor Sheffield and said ‘Take this,’ and he got a great shot of me with the President and with the First Lady.”

Out of that event came an invitation to Clinton’s second inauguration.

“I went to D.C., and Sen. (Frank) Murkowski saw to it that I got a seat

right in front of the podium,” he said. Seated near him were pop singer Michael Bolton, actor Kevin Costner and John F. Kennedy Jr.

“The hospitality business can sure take you places.” he said. “That was the most awesome experience I’ve ever had—it was the topping on the cake, to put it in culinary terms.”

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