



Percy S. Whatley CEC, PC3

Executive Chef ~ The Ahwahnee | Yosemite National Park, California

Percy S. Whatley is the Executive Chef of The Ahwahnee, Yosemite National Park's Four-Diamond, historic national landmark hotel. Built in 1927, the hotel is registered with Historic Hotels of America and operated under contract with the National Park Service by concessioner DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc.

Whatley was named to his position in November 2005 and oversees all aspects of food production at The Ahwahnee. His extensive staff exceeds 60 in number, and he also manages the financial aspects of the kitchen's labor, inventory control and operating supplies.

Initially arriving in the park in 1989, Whatley's Yosemite culinary career began as a cook at the Pizza Deck in Curry Village, site of the Park's first lodging facilities dating back to 1899. He departed briefly, earning an Associates of Science Degree in Business Management from The College of the Redwoods in Eureka, California, and returned to Yosemite with his new bride, Leslee, assuming the summer management of White Wolf Lodge in the High Sierra. Whatley then joined the ranks of The Ahwahnee, holding multiple kitchen positions including Chef de Partie.

In January 1996, Whatley enrolled at the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. Whatley graduated with honors in October 1997, returning to The Ahwahnee as Sous Chef. There he honed his creative skills, developing special entrées and appetizers for the cultured palates of Ahwahnee guests.

In the summer of 1999, Whatley became the Executive Chef at the Wawona Hotel in the southernmost section of Yosemite. Two and a half years later, in the spring of 2002, Whatley assumed responsibility for all aspects of food production, dining room service and catering at the Wawona Hotel, including elaborate weddings, banquets and lawn barbecues. His wine & food pairing expertise became significantly enhanced when he was also assigned a major role in the selection of the hotel's wines. Under the guidance of DNC Corporate Chef Roland Henin CMC, Whatley earned dual certification by passing the distinguished ProChef III exam, proctored by The Culinary Institute of America, earning him the prestigious Certified Executive Chef and Certified ProChef III designations.

Whatley returned to The Ahwahnee for a third term in the fall of 2003 as the interim Food & Beverage Manager. He soon accepted the position of Executive Sous Chef and began the use of organic and sustainable ingredients, allowing him to become a major contributor to DNC's environmental initiatives.

Whatley's responsibilities also include overseeing the culinary aspects of The Ahwahnee's signature special events. For more than 25 years, The Ahwahnee has hosted Vintners' Holidays, an annual celebration of wine and food featuring 32 industry-leading winemakers and four moderators the month of November. Whatley has the honor of writing the menus for each of the eight gala dinners, pairing their courses with the wines each vintner is highlighting. This unique style of wine and food pairing is at Whatley's discretion ~ the food is chosen for each wine rather than the traditional reverse pairing. Whatley uses his extensive knowledge of viticulture to compliment the subtleties of each wine with unique California cuisine.

Since the first Christmas at The Ahwahnee in 1927, the Bracebridge Dinner series has become a unique American holiday tradition.. World-class musical theater inspired by Washington Irving's tales of a 17th-century Old English Yuletide feast is intertwined with Whatley's seven-course, themed menu via a procession-style service for 300 people.

In January each year, 24 chefs from around the country are guests in The Ahwahnee kitchen for the annual Chefs' Holidays event. Guest Chefs have included James Beard Award Winners and Nominees, Food Network's Next Iron Chef contestants, and *Food & Wine* magazine's Best New Chefs. Whatley plays host to them all, aiding the chefs in their execution of culinary demonstrations and five-course gala dinners for 250 people.

Whatley was recently selected as one of eight semi-finalists to represent Bocuse d'Or USA, an organization designed to train an American team of chefs which will compete for the prestigious representation of the United States at the Bocuse d'Or World Cuisine Contest in Lyon, France. Whatley also competed before a live audience with seven other semi-finalists September 26-27, 2008 at the Epcot International Food & Wine Festival in Lake Buena Vista, Florida.