



THE STAR

Media release

The Star Gold Coast commis chef looks to the future with training award on horizon

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A culinary apprentice-turned-commis chef at one of The Star Gold Coast's most signature restaurants is in the running to be crowned the best apprentice in South East Queensland (SEQ) as part of the '2020 South East Region – Queensland Training Awards' to be held in September.

Twenty-one year old Sarah Hunt will compete against apprentices from a range of trades including mechanical, automotive, carpentry, electrical, and refrigeration to win the coveted 'Harry Hauenschild Apprentice of the Year.'

Ms Hunt completed her three-year culinary apprenticeship in November with The Star Culinary Institute – a partnership between The Star Entertainment Group and TAFE Queensland that commenced in 2012.

Securing a commis chef position shortly after at The Star Gold Coast's award-winning Nineteen at The Star restaurant, located on the rooftop of The Darling luxury suite hotel, Sarah said being a finalist in the regional awards reflected her strong passion for food and lifelong learning.

"It's really nice to be recognised as a finalist in SEQ after completing my apprenticeship across both The Star's Treasury Brisbane and The Star Gold Coast properties," Sarah said.

"The apprenticeship gave me the best start to my career – I got to work with some of the company's top chefs and in a range of areas from their production kitchens to working in Asian venues like Fat Noodle in Brisbane and fine dining restaurants like Nineteen at The Star on the Gold Coast, famous for its premium steak and seafood.

"I loved the unique learning opportunities provided including participating in signature masterclasses with our senior chefs, site visits to farms and producers, and exposure to a variety of internal and external competitions."

Sarah said it was this diverse experience, and the support of the senior chefs at The Star Gold Coast, that gave her the confidence to email a range of Michelin-star restaurants in Europe about undertaking a short, unpaid work experience stint with them before commencing her commis chef role at Nineteen at The Star.

"I couldn't believe it when I heard back from a two-star Michelin restaurant in Copenhagen; and a two-star Michelin restaurant in Berlin, which received its second star the day that I arrived to start work," Sarah said.

"I was a ball of excitement and nerves when I flew to Europe by myself for the first time but it was everything I could have hoped for – first-hand international experience in European cuisine from some of the world's best.

"Similar to where I work now at Nineteen at The Star, I really enjoyed the comradery and being treated like family with the chefs open to teaching me some of their innovative cooking ideas and techniques.

“For example, one of the restaurants was renowned for its desserts but didn’t rely on using refined sugar, gluten, or flour to create sweetness – so I learnt about alternative natural foods that could be used instead such as reducing juices to make syrups or using products like coconut sugar.”

Although it was an eye-opening experience, the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic saw Sarah pack up her bags early to return home halfway through her two-month overseas trip.

She said returning to the Gold Coast at a time when social distancing restrictions were affecting the local hospitality industry was a daunting experience but it taught her how to be resilient in the face of uncertainty.

“I never doubted the profession I had chosen because being a chef is something that I’ve always dreamed about doing since I was a little girl,” Sarah said.

“If anything, this experience has taught me to keep an eye on the big picture as people are always going to need food and will want to enjoy sharing it with friends and family. In fact, I think that period of isolation has reinforced to many people just how much we take our small freedoms, like going out for a meal, for granted.”

Since returning to work at Nineteen at The Star, Sarah said she’s come back to a new world but the property’s and restaurant’s tightened rules around personal hygiene and food safety were rigorous.

“We’ve undertaken a range of training to ensure a COVID-safe workplace for our guests and our team – things like recording guests’ details, constant hand sanitising, wearing gloves, providing guests with warm towels to wipe their hands with as they arrive, and following social distancing measures are all part of the ‘norm’ now,” Sarah said.

“It gives me extra confidence in the future and continuing to develop my skills and grow my career as a chef.”

The Star Gold Coast Chief Operating Officer Jessica Mellor said she was thrilled for Sarah to be shortlisted as a finalist in the awards, which comes as parent company, The Star Entertainment Group, and its partners invest billions of dollars in delivering world-class integrated resorts on the Gold Coast and in Brisbane.

“Our ongoing expansion at The Star Gold Coast, through the Dorsett hotel and apartments tower, and our future Queen’s Wharf Brisbane integrated resort development will present extraordinary career opportunities for aspiring Queensland chefs when they open in 2022,” Ms Mellor said.

“Sarah is a great example of the young culinary talent we have on board, with her other achievements including being selected to compete in commercial cookery at the 2020 WorldSkills National Championships in Perth next year, along with another team member Trinity Garcia who will compete in bakery.

“We are delighted that Sarah is a contender in this year’s South East region ‘Apprentice of the Year’ category and we wish her all the best of luck in September.”

Delivered by the Department of Employment, Small Business, and Training, the prestigious ‘South East Region – Queensland Training Awards’ – which celebrates top achievers in training across the Gold Coast, Logan, Scenic Rim, and Redlands – will be held on 11 September 2020.

For more information:

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