**Cured!**

*In San Antonio, Texas, Chef Steve McHugh Celebrates Life*

Four-time James Beard Foundation Awards’ finalist for “Best Chef: Southwest,” **Steve McHugh** is from a large farm family – seven boys – in a small Wisconsin town, far from San Antonio, Texas, and farther still from the rich culinary culture of New Orleans, Louisiana, where his career as a fine dining chef took flight.

But his interest in the restaurant world started back on the farm, when he followed an older brother at age fourteen to work in a nearby tavern, washing dishes. Within a year he had been elevated to short-order cook, flipping burgers and loving every minute of it. A jazz saxophone scholarship got him to college, but he soon realized that he would rather study cooking – so he made his way to the Culinary Institute of America. For his externship at the prestigious school, Steven requested a placement in New Orleans, where he figured that he could soak in the jazz scene as well as culinary experience. He was right. Upon graduating, he got himself right back down, working with Creole Chef Chris Brown, Dickie Brennan, and Ralph Brennan of the legendary restaurant family.

After Katrina, McHugh worked 20-hour days, going through gallons of bleach to scrub out the restaurant, and serving breakfasts to hundreds of FEMA workers from a trailer. “A couple of fine-dining chefs, slinging scrambled eggs for 600 – we didn’t know what we were doing!” laughs McHugh, who was glad to be serving in the trenches. He worked his way around the Louisiana culinary scene, becoming chef de cuisine of Restaurant August, then La Provence, where the former farm boy established a kitchen garden and farmyard. As the floating chef within the company, he was also responsible for off-site catering and banquets.

In January 2012, the thoughtful and energetic chef faced his greatest challenge by far: a diagnosis of cancer. “I remember the moment clearly, because I was in New Orleans, and the Saints had just beaten the Vikings in the Championship Game,” he says, wryly.  He set out to beat his own opponent, non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma with two tumors, one the size of a grapefruit – with fierce determination, two operations, and a year of chemotherapy. Now in remission, his check-up visits are more often consumed with the subject of food, than cancer.

McHugh’s new lease on life propelled him forward toward a long-held dream: a restaurant of his own. Its name is “**Cured**.”  Located in Pearl, San Antonio’s groundbreaking culinary center that occupies the campus of the city’s late great Pearl Brewery, Cured refers to more than just the fact of recovered health. It is all about the house-cured meats and a menu of equally time-consuming culinary elements that have been lovingly handcrafted with just as much care and faith from the finest, freshest local ingredients in a gastro-pub style ambiance. Bitters for the cocktails. Vinegars for the pickling.

For his restaurant’s logo, McHugh chose to incorporate the legendary triple-X insignia that graced bottles and kegs produced on the premises dating back to the 19th century, when it was known as the City Brewery, and then as the San Antonio Brewing Association, and, finally, most recently, as Pearl. The symbol began further back still, in 16th-century Europe, as a rating system by which royal couriers would mark the doors of inns along the path of a royal progress. Those serving particularly good beer received a “XXX,” which told the traveling monarch that this was a stop not to be missed. Centuries later, in Texas, the sign was adopted as a symbol of quality beer and pride in the craft of brewing. By combining the triple X’s and the hourglass shape, the tertiary mark of Cured unites an ancient symbol of excellence, the history of the Pearl Brewery, and the notion that artisanal craftsmanship takes time.

Cured, the restaurant, says McHugh, cures hunger and thirst. But it does more than nourish the body; it feeds the soul, through McHugh’s commitment to helping others. “I studied social work once upon a time when I was in college, and that sense of wanting to make a positive difference in people’s lives has never left me.” McHugh engages in active “gastronomic giving” by donating $1 from every charcuterie board to a different charitable organization every quarter. Each September, his “Cured for a Cure” dinner raises tens of thousands of dollars for the Leukemia Lymphoma Society.

“Beyond what was on the plate at Cured, I want to achieve the sense of warmth and support that I remember growing up on the farm, where our kitchen table was the gathering place for the whole community. I want every person’s experience to be more than just a meal.” This sense of community reaches far beyond the walls of Cured. As a graduate who is committed to the betterment of his alma mater, the Culinary Institute of America, McHugh was invited to be on the Advisory Council of the CIA San Antonio Campus in April 2014. As a Council member, he lends his expertise in various areas: examining, discussing, solving or leveraging the various challenges and opportunities that face the campus.

Cured was named a top 50 nominee for *Bon Appétit’s* “America’s Best New Restaurants 2014”, a runner up for *Esquire’s* “Best New Restaurants in America 2014”, and to *Eater’s* list of “38 Essential Texas Restaurants” in 2018. McHugh is recognized by the James Beard Foundation as a Smart Catch Leader for his use of the purest regional ingredients paired with organic methods, which influences others to focus their efforts in maintaining healthy, sustainable food sources now and for future generations. Good Food 100 Restaurants and James Beard Foundation selected Cured as a restaurant that exemplifies sustainability through its purchasing to support every link in the food chain and change the food system for good.

For more information, contact simoneink:

Simone Rathlé | president | simone@simoneink.com