



**SOUTHWESTERN**  
AN OREGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# A delicious life

OCCI alum is living the culinary dream



It's been a long and winding road for Justin Wolf to reach the status of Executive Chef. Born and raised in Medford, Oregon, cooking was always a big part of his family and life. Even his senior project in high school involved cooking, teaching kids how to help with dinner. And as long as we're mentioning family, Justin's father, Michael works at the SWOCC Curry campus!

Because his culinary journey began at Southwestern's Oregon Coast Culinary Institute (OCCI), graduating with honors in 2011 at age 19, we were very interested in 'the rest of the story'. We caught up with Chef Wolf at his new gig, Executive Chef for Partake in Grants Pass. He had just finished baking the bread for the day and had a short break before preparations for the evening's delicacies began.

**OCCI:** So first, tell us about the new restaurant, Partake Shop & Lounge.

**Wolf:** I'm so excited about Partake. It's different. It's not your average restaurant, lounge, or shop. It's a bit of all three. We're doing an upscale, small plate menu in the lounge, along with signature cocktails. I'm in charge of developing the menu and it's constantly evolving.

We also have an international bottle shop and wine tasting room on the premises. And in case that's not enough to tempt you, we house an artisan cheese shop too – which sells a lot more than just cheese. I bake the bread daily for the lounge and the cheese shop. And to top it off we're located in a gorgeous historic building in downtown Grants Pass. We opened our doors on November 23, 2021.

**OCCI:** *We checked out the menu on the website. It looks amazing. So now . . . let's back up a bit and talk about the start of your career. Tell us what factors influenced your choice to come to OCCI for your culinary training.*

**Wolf:** I love the coast, crabbing, fishing, the outdoors, the lake. As a family we used to visit the coast a lot when I was a kid. I still come as much as possible with my wife. And I love cooking with seafood so OCCI's location was great for that. Being from out of the area, I needed to live on campus which ended up saving me a lot of money. I was looking for the most cost-effective culinary training. It was perfect, close enough to home, not too close, not too far away.

**OCCI:** *Can you share something important that you learned at OCCI that you draw on now in your work?*

**Wolf:** I remember distinctly my Interpersonal Communication class. That class proved invaluable when it comes to working in a kitchen with a lot of different people. My time at OCCI also taught me how to run an efficient kitchen.

**OCCI:** *Do you remember a particular experience you had while at OCCI that really had an impact on you?*

**Wolf:** One of the concepts that I was exposed to at OCCI that has really influenced my work is the farm-to-table principle. I'm committed to local, sustainable, and renewable practices. I also learned about the French sous vide technique of cooking. It's a method where food is sealed in a pouch and then heated in a water bath. I saw it first demonstrated the day I toured OCCI. I'm obsessed with it and use it all the time.

**OCCI:** *Chef Randy Torres was your instructor. What do you remember about Chef Torres?*

**Wolf:** Chef Torres is very knowledgeable and approachable. I was intimidated by him at first because of his vast and impressive experience. But when you get to know him, he's great.

**OCCI:** *What was living in student housing like?*

**Wolf:** Living on campus was fun. I made some great friends I still stay in contact with. I used to bring home leftovers and trade with the baking and pastry students that lived upstairs.

**OCCI:** *Why would you recommend OCCI to people considering a career in the culinary arts?*

**Wolf:** It's an exceptional place! Especially for young people, who need to get a good base foundation of culinary skills.

**OCCI:** *Now the experienced sage gets to pass on some advice to the younger set interested in a culinary career . . .*

**Wolf:** It took a lot of trial and error for me to get where I am today. I wasn't afraid to leave a situation if I wasn't growing. If it's not the right fit, it's time to go. Just look at my resume. I've worked at a lot of places and learned something different from each experience.

And . . . don't take no for an answer when you find a restaurant you want to work at.

**Does a delicious career in the culinary world sound good to you?**

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