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# PRESS RELEASE

## Brookings chef wins 2016 Generation Next Award

*Matt Chapman cooks up the wow-factor at Swiftel Center*



Brookings, S.D. (09/14/2016) – Matt Chapman, Director of Food & Beverage and Executive Chef at the Swiftel Center, is one of five distinguished professionals who have won the Generation Next award granted by Venues Today Magazine.

Chapman, 32, competed along with 31 other young professionals for one of the coveted awards given to individuals for his/her achievement or outstanding service as a young industry leader. The Generation Next Award focuses on honoring young professionals under 35 years old who make a difference in sports, music, conventions, family shows and festivals. Chapman and the other award winners were honored in late August at the Venues Today RISE conference in Long Beach, CA.

“Coming into job and becoming the Food & Beverage Manager I never expected to be nominated for such an award.” Chapman said, “I have always come to work every day with the goal of giving our clients and customers the best experience I possibly can.”

Chapman is the first employee at Swiftel Center to win this award. He graduated from Brookings High School and not long after was a student at Le Cordon Bleu Culinary School in Portland, Oregon. Chapman continued to work in Portland for six months before taking his first Executive Chef position in Sioux Falls. He then returned to Brookings and helped with the opening of Old Market. Chapman started full-time with the Swiftel Center team in May 2014.

“To be recognized for something that you are passionate about and have worked hard to excel at is a truly special feeling.” Chapman said, “I have always thought that any individual award is still a team award, I could not accomplish anything without a great team around me.”

To learn more about the Generation Next award and Venues Today, visit [www.venuestoday.com/news/detail/congratulations-2016-generation-next-award-winners](http://www.venuestoday.com/news/detail/congratulations-2016-generation-next-award-winners)

Chapman was featured in the May edition of Venues Today Magazine, along with the other Generation Next award recipients. A text-only version of the article is included below. To access the full, high-resolution article and photos, please contact Kristina Lankow at [klankow@swiftelcenter.com](mailto:klankow@swiftelcenter.com).



It's not often that a new graduate from culinary school is offered a job as an executive chef at a hotel. Even so, Matt Chapman, currently working as executive chef and food and beverage director of the Swiftel Center in Brookings, S.D., found himself in exactly that position upon completing his studies at the Le Cordon Bleu Academy of Culinary Arts in Portland, Ore.

For Dan Wilde, who was working as the assistant general manager at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Sioux Falls, Chapman's knack for surpassing expectations and leaving lasting impressions on his customers made him an obvious choice for the position. And made him a 2016 Venues Today Generation Next recipient.

After working with him at other establishments in Brookings, Wilde said that Chapman would always “not just do the best for the customer, but give them a wow-factor as well, so that they're going to have a memorable evening.” Wilde said that when working in an industry that covers everything from weddings to conventions, growing this sort of reputation for a venue is essential. “You want to have something where someone is going to walk away and say, ‘If I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it here.’” Chapman, according to Wilde, “does that.”

Swiftel Center's location in Brookings is an ideal fit for Chapman since he was born in town and attended high school there. Brookings is also where he learned how to cook.

When Chapman decided on the culinary arts as a profession in high school, the direction surprised everyone, but was quickly appreciated by anyone who tasted what he made.

After choosing cooking as a job when he was young, Chapman said, "It didn't feel like a job, it felt like it came naturally."

After graduating and getting Wilde's offer, Chapman described an "upward path" ever since when he "rose to the challenge" of executive responsibilities.

Chapman came to his current position at Swiftel Center when Tom Richter, GM there for VenuWorks, discovered his cooking.

The product, said Richter, has exceeded expectations. Chapman has grown the business "substantially," Richter said, increasing sales by 10% for each of the two and a half years he has worked at Swiftel, as well as bringing revenues for food and beverages to over \$1 million in 2015.

"As soon as I got here I hit the ground running," Chapman said of his time at the venue, "and we've just been building and growing ever since. It's been at a break-neck pace." Richter said that customer service has improved as well, thanks in large part to Chapman's efforts, not to mention what he creates in the kitchen.

"What he produces in the kitchen is phenomenal," said Richter. "Every meal that we have people attend, be it a breakfast, a sandwich for lunch, or a fancy dinner, every event I hear comments that it was the best meal they've ever had. You just can't make that up."

In the short two-and-half years he has worked at Swiftel Center, Chapman's output is impressive. From serving 1,700 people at a Catholic Youth Rally in 27 minutes to holding the Sanford Hospital Gala (an event requiring building kitchens outside, putting out 10 lines, and serving food worthy of the \$150 per plate price tag to 2,000 guests), Chapman has delivered on all fronts.

"That wowed me working with him," Wilde said of the Gala. "By the end of the night you're all hugs and glad it's over, but I couldn't have done it without him. And we didn't just do it once."

Aside from his talents for large-scale organization and execution, Chapman still keeps a sharp eye on the small picture as well. Tara Krause, food and beverage manager at Swiftel Center, shared a story from 2015 in which a customer, sight unseen, came to the kitchen with special dietary needs that kept them from enjoying the meal with their party.

Undaunted, Chapman went to the kitchen and whipped up a meal for the individual that met his requirements of abstaining from dairy, gluten and shellfish. Even though the situation was a complete surprise, the customer was so impressed by Chapman's generosity and attitude that they nominated him for an ABLE Award, recognizing people who make efforts to help those with special needs. Chapman won the award, and Krause applauded the recognition.

"It's great to see that people recognize his willingness to cater," Krause said, "and we want everyone to have the best possible experience they can have here. If that means helping someone with special needs then he's the first one to jump in and help."

Besides Chapman, no one is surprised to see him add the Generation Next Award for 2016 to his list of accomplishments. Nevertheless, he said that it is "actually a little overwhelming" to receive the award.

"We are such a small town and such a small staff here," Chapman said. "To be recognized for something like this is great, it's nice to know that small buildings can do big things. Looking at some of the other award recipients it seems like they are well deserving and run these big operations, where I feel like we are just making our mark just in individual relationships and individual events where we can do everything we can. It just means so much to be recognized on a national level like that."

Chapman went on to describe his staff as a family, and made it clear that the win belongs to every one of its members.

"When we tackle these big events it's because of the dedication of everybody that works here," said Chapman. "Any award that is received individually I believe is a team award. There is no way that any individual award could happen without the rest of your team."

Given the perspective and accomplishments he has obtained at this point in his career, and all at the young age of 33, Chapman said that he would tell a younger version of himself to remain strong through bouts of indecision.

"I'm very happy with where I am now," Chapman said, "so I guess I would say keep at it. Keep working hard, it will pay off. Don't get frustrated, you're headed in the right direction, you just have to keep the faith that you're going to get there."

BY GREG LEHMAN

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#### **About the Swiftel Center**

The Swiftel Center is a gathering place for cultural, recreational and educational events. With a 30,000 square foot arena, state-of-the-art banquet rooms, conference rooms and in-house catering, the Swiftel Center is an international award-winning venue of excellence and one of South Dakota's premiere event centers. | [www.swiftelcenter.com](http://www.swiftelcenter.com)

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