
Honoring Sheldon Simeon Distinguished Alumnus



Although his family moved from Pepeekeo to Hilo when he was still quite young, Sheldon Simeon still spent a lot of time at his grandfather's house in Pepeekeo. That bears mention because it was there that Sheldon was exposed to a household full of chefs, led by his father, Reinior, a 1969 Hilo High grad, and Grandpa Urbano himself. "We grew up eating all kinds of local food, like smoke meat, fried fish, fish soup, and veggies from Grandpa's garden," Sheldon recalls.

The 2000 Hilo High grad also has fond memories of school, where Sheldon played music, volleyball and participated in all sorts of school activities. His engaging personality was recognized his senior year when he was voted "Mr. Aloha."

"At Hilo High, going to school was like attending a family party—everybody knew each other and each other's family. I enjoyed interacting socially with other people, which people-wise and career-wise is an important life skill," he adds.

Sheldon initially thought of becoming an architect, but changed his mind after seeing his brother, Jeremy, find success in the Leeward Community College (LCC) Culinary Arts Program on Oahu. "After all, we grew up cooking," Sheldon remarks. "It was something we enjoyed... and were pretty good at!"

LCC was followed by an internship at Walt Disney World (Florida), where Sheldon met his wife, Janice, a Maui girl. He returned briefly to Oahu to complete his LCC requirements then joined Janice on Maui, where an old Hilo High buddy helped him land a job at Aloha Mixed Plate. Sheldon enrolled in the Maui Culinary Academy, worked his way up from dishwasher and busboy to chef at Aloha Mixed Plate, and later helped to establish sister restaurants Star Noodle (2010) and Leoda's Kitchen & Pie Shop (2011).

It was at Star Noodle that Sheldon's innovative dishes first attracted national attention. He garnered two very prestigious James Beard semifinalist honors—one for "Rising Star" and the other for "Best New Restaurant" (Star Noodle) in 2011. He also earned the Rising Star Award from StarChefs.com in 2012 and was nominated for Best New Chef – People's Choice, Northwest & Pacific, by Food & Wine Magazine.

It was in 2013, however, that Sheldon's career suddenly went into overdrive, as he successfully competed on the Bravo Channel's *Top Chef: Seattle*, finishing in the top three and earning "fan favorite" honors. Week after week, Sheldon wowed celebrity judges such as Emeril Lagasse and Wolfgang Puck by taking local Filipino and island flavors and ingredients to create inventive and flavorful dishes.

Gaining legions of fans across the country, today Sheldon serves as executive chef for both Mala and Migrant—two highly acclaimed restaurants located in the Wailea Beach Marriott Resort & Spa.

More importantly, Sheldon is a loving husband and father of three beautiful girls, and has generously used his fame to help those in need through numerous fundraisers, such as Philippine disaster relief. He also serves as mentor to the Lahainaluna High School culinary team and works with students at the Maui Culinary Academy.

Throughout his still-young career, Sheldon admits that he has pushed himself hard in his quest to discover new ingredients and flavors. "I feel like I've come full circle, back to my roots. Now, I'm very influenced by the food I grew up eating... It comes down to good ingredients and good technique," he concludes. And, speaking of coming full circle, Sheldon admits to dreaming of someday opening a restaurant in his hometown of Hilo.
