

Exec chef at Lake Tahoe Hard Rock a STHS grad

By Kathryn Reed

Jonathan Snyder, who is no stranger to Tahoe or the culinary world, is eager to transform the food scene on the South Shore.

He has been tapped to be the executive chef at Lake Tahoe Hard Rock hotel-casino.

Snyder is a 1991 graduate of South Tahoe High School. He moved to the area as a kid when his parents bought what was the Dory's Oar in South Lake Tahoe. His wife, Michelle, is also a grad of STHS. Having twin 4-year-olds – a boy and girl – played a role in their decision to return to Tahoe from Las Vegas.



Jonathan Snyder is executive chef of Hard Rock Lake Tahoe. Photo/Provided

"We want to give our kids the same type of upbringing my wife and I had," Snyder said.

The family has been vacationing in the basin at least annually. Hiking, biking and skiing are how they like to enjoy the outdoors.

When Snyder left Tahoe he went to the Culinary Institute of America in New York. He spent eight years as executive chef at the Prime Steakhouse at Bellagio in Las Vegas, two years as assistant corporate chef for Pure Management Group, 2½ years as chef at Rare 120 at the Hard Rock Hotel Las Vegas, 16 months as executive sous chef for the Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego, and nearly two years as executive chef at House of Blues/Foundation Room in Vegas.

As executive chef of Lake Tahoe Hard Rock, Snyder will oversee all the food and beverage operations. There will be four restaurants, with three having a bar in them. Then there will be two or three standalone bars. Plus, there will be the pool bar.

Specifics of what the restaurant concepts will be are being kept under wraps. There will be one that is more upscale, one that is open 24 hours, one serving breakfast, and something on the casual side. Snyder said one restaurant – he wouldn't say which one – will have a similar concept to what exists at the Vegas Hard Rock.

"One will be a lot more fun, not as formal. It will be a really cool spot that people will enjoy. I think a lot of locals will enjoy that spot," Snyder said.

He added that the Stateline property, including dining establishments, is going to have a Tahoe feel.

"Warner Hospitality is the managing partner. They had some concepts in mind, but as far as the menus go, that has pretty much been put in my hands," Snyder told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Tastings are under way and will be ongoing through the fall to finalize the menus.

While the official word is the hotel-casino that is being transformed in Stateline at what was the Horizon will be ready during the 2014-15 ski season, there is talk of a December

opening.

Snyder is doing research to find out where to get the best locally/regionally sourced food. He is in talks with the Tahoe Lobster Company to possibly have a crayfish dish made with the crustaceans pulled from Lake Tahoe.

While menus will change, restaurants will also have signature dishes that will be a mainstay.

“To me a big part of being a chef, being a restaurant operator, is staying current with trends and staying current with seasons, and being able to change and adapt,” Snyder said.

He doesn't flinch at the prospect of having to cater to special diets – be it vegetarian or gluten free. Snyder said with all the food allergies out there it's important for chefs to be able cook for everyone.

When it comes time for adult beverages, locally sourced ingredients will be considered for stocking the bars, too.

“It is like being a chef behind the bar, especially with the different juices, flavors and garnishes,” Snyder said.

Specialty cocktails, wine and beer lists are being finalized. This may include wines from El Dorado and Amador counties, but definitely Sonoma and Napa counties.

Snyder said he is looking forward to launching Lake Tahoe Hard Rock from scratch. He's had experience opening restaurants, though he said it's not easy to make sure all the moving parts fall into place.

It will take a team to make it work. He expects to hire between 40 and 50 cooks, and another 50 who will be servers/bartenders and other front-back of house staff.

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Notes:

- The hotel's career center opens Sept. 22 at 50 Highway 50, Stateline. The property will hire more than 500 employees for hotel, gaming, restaurant and entertainment positions. For more info, go online and click on the "Careers" tab to view all available positions.