

FRANCOIS

Mentions in [The Daily Herald-Tribune](#), Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada





First dream was horse racing

By LEIF SOLLID
Herald-Tribune staff

Gary Francois, the new executive chef of the Grande Prairie Renford Inn, has come a long way since his days as a would-be professional jockey on the Caribbean island of Trinidad.

At the age of 15 and weighing a mere 90 pounds, the youthful Francois had a gleam in his eye and a goal in life. He wanted to race thoroughbred horses.

To that end, he dropped out of school and enrolled in an apprenticeship program at a local racetrack several miles from home.

Only one obstacle stood in his way, and it was formidable.

His parents disapproved of his quest and refused to support him financially. Receiving no pay for his work, the feather-light jockey's career inexorably ground to a halt six months later.

"My parents didn't like it. They thought it was too dangerous," he said smiling amiably during an interview in the Renford Inn's Cafe 101.

Despite having to give up his dream, the 40-year-old culinary whiz has no regrets he never became a professional jockey. Riding atop charging steeds, he admits, would have been a precarious and dangerous existence.

After his racing days had ended, his strong-willed father gave him a choice: go back to school or go to work. The decision was easy: work.

To get him started, his father, a chef, hired him to work nights cleaning his hotel. He didn't do very well, and after six months his father turned around and fired him.

Grinning merrily, Francois recalls: "I hated that (job) more than I hated school."

That dismissal, and perhaps fate, led him to learn the trade of short order cooking. And seven years later he left Trinidad for Canada to study food sciences at the University of Toronto.

But like his ill-fated career as a jockey, the halls of academia proved insurmountable. He passed his math and english, "but I couldn't handle the chemistry and physics. It was too tough."

Dropping out after only one semester, the resilient and undaunted Francois zealously pursued his cooking career. Contrary to his less than dazzling scholastic record, he enjoyed remarkable success in the workaday world.

In a matter of a few years, he had risen to the position of chef tournament at the Holiday Inn in Rexdale, Ont. and was subsequently promoted to sous chef and then executive chef of the Holiday Inn in Sault Ste. Marie in 1976.

Following that, he bounced between jobs on the West Coast and Ontario before joining up with the Renford Inn in Edmonton 2½ years ago.

Grande Prairie was not in his plans — that is, until he visited here six short weeks ago. Francois came to Grande Prairie to hire staff for the local hotel. To his surprise, he was so impressed with the operation he decided to stay.

"I liked what I saw and I liked the general manager (Dick Stewart), so I asked him to make me an offer I couldn't refuse, and he did."

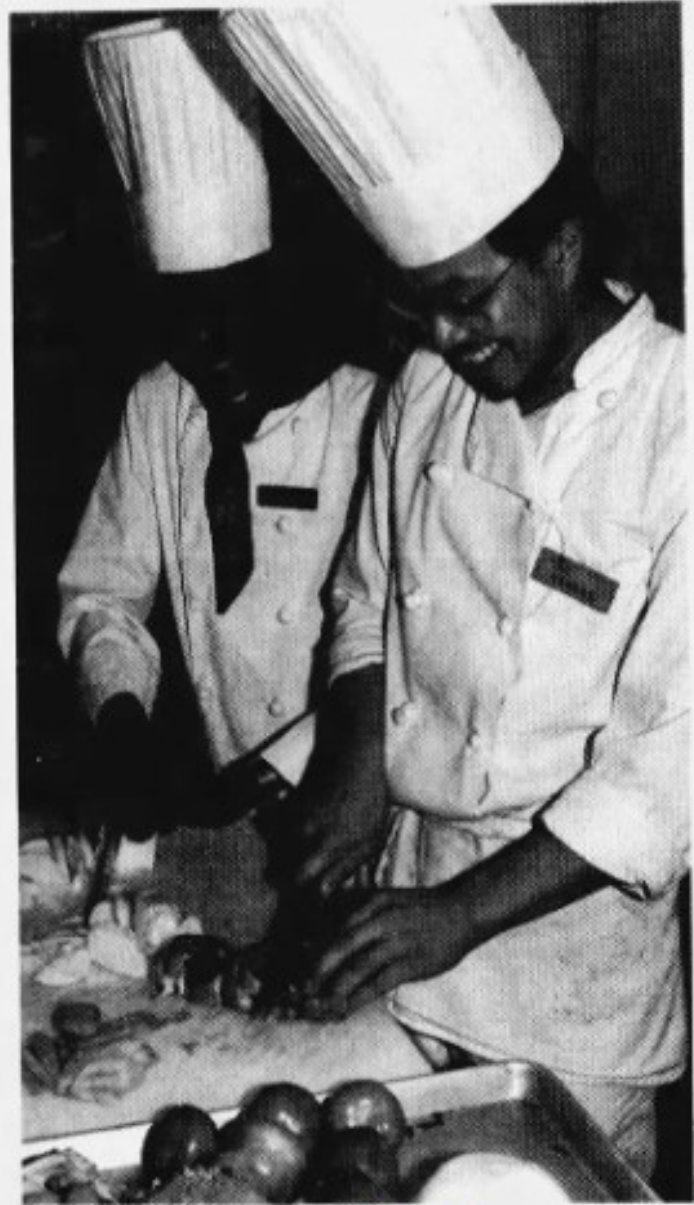
As executive chef, Francois oversees the Renford Inn's entire food operation. Everything from food purchasing, staffing, inventory control, maintenance and cleanliness fall under his control.

But while he has dozens of other tasks, he is quick to point out cooking is still his main responsibility and his true vocation.

"I spend most of my time in the kitchen," he says, stressing the importance of training his staff in the finer points of the culinary arts.

Of course, he hasn't gotten this far in the business without a tried and true method of success: "Good food and good entertainment at a reasonable price."

Although that philosophy may seem relatively simple, the task of fulfilling it is anything but easy. Long hours and tireless dedication are



Renford Inn executive chef Gary Francois (left) and sous chef George Mah enjoy the camaraderie of working as a team.

imperative.

But then, as Francois acknowledges, that comes with the territory.

"You either do what you have to do, and if you don't like it, you find something else.

"I try my best all the time. I do not make promises, I perform."



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Renford Inn executive Chef Gary **Francois**
Congratulates these recent winners of the
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L to R: Gary **Francois** 1st place winner, Karl Velyan
2nd place, David Picken and 3rd place, David Palmu

*Welcome
Back
Gary!*



Chef Gary Francois

Renford Inn Grande Prairie would like to take this opportunity to welcome Gary **Francois** back from his extended leave. Gary will be returning to work at Renford Inn on Monday, August 27, 1990. We have all missed Gary and are pleased to see him back.

To all of our guests who have missed his great brunch be ready for Sunday, Sept. 2, 1990. He may have brought some new recipes from the Eastern side of Canada.



Again Gary, Welcome Home (from all of your friends at Renford Inn, Grande Prairie).

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**Gary Francois, 42,
of Grande Prairie**



On Monday, December 31, 1990, Gary Francois passed away at the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital, Grande Prairie, Alberta, at the age of 42.

Gary had currently been a resident and chef at the Stanford Inn (formerly Renford Inn) in Grande Prairie.

Gary is survived by family in the United States and Trinidad.

Funeral service for the late Gary Francois will be held at the Oliver Funeral Chapel, Grande Prairie, Alberta, on Monday, January 7, 1991, at 2:00 p.m., with Canon Isaac Graham officiating. Cremation to follow in the Oliver Crematorium.

If friends so desire, memorial donations may be made to the charity of one's choice.

Funeral arrangements are entrusted to Oliver Funeral Chapel & Crematorium, Grande Prairie. Telephone 532-2929.

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