

## No Flash in the Pan - A Teacher Profile of Mike Austin

By Gerry Brach, Brooks Secondary School Counsellor



Mike Austin's long cooking career is coming to an end on July 1, as he officially retires from Brooks. As he looks back on his 28-year teaching career, and also on the cooking he has done on private yachts, he feels fortunate to have met so many interesting people along the way.

Mike first became interested in cooking when he was a student at North Delta Senior Secondary School, in the late 1970's. He enrolled in the culinary arts program in Grade 11 + 12, but wasn't sure he wanted to cook as a career. After graduating from high-school he worked for B.C. Hydro for a year, first emptying bus fare boxes on a grave-yard shift and later sorting and delivering mail. Realizing he needed more skills training, he signed up for a meat-cutting course at Pacific Vocational Institute (BCIT). As there was a two year wait list for the meat cutting course, he ended up completing a Level 1 Cooks Training Course instead. After finishing

his cooks training, he travelled to Australia and New Zealand for a fifteen-month working holiday. Missing Canada, he returned to a job cooking at a restaurant on Granville Island and earning his Red Seal Certification. From there he went looking for more adventure and ended up finding a job as a cook on a private yacht. Over the next few years Mike continued cooking on private yachts including Western Broadcasting (Frank Griffiths), Belkins Paper and Arrow Transportation. During this time, he worked long hours cooking for corporate clients while cruising the BC coast from Vancouver to Florida via the Panama Canal. He also enjoyed sport fishing and guiding when not cooking on the yachts. Other perks were getting to meet the Vancouver Canucks on Frank Griffith's yacht and getting free tickets to Canuck games. "I met a lot of interesting people, including politicians, world leaders, and Hollywood types like Sydney Poitier and Merv Griffin."

Although Mike liked his job, he realized that he needed to find something that provided a more normal life for his family, as he was away for months at a time. After doing some research he ended up completing a Provincial Instructors Program from Vancouver Community College in 1992 and then taught for two years at Johnson Heights Secondary School in Surrey. He taught another year on the Gulf Islands before taking a job at Brooks in 1996. Along the way Mike worked hard to obtain his Bachelor of Education degree at the secondary level by attending five summer school sessions at U.B.C.

Highlights of his twenty-five years of teaching at Brooks include: catering for 1300 people for one week at the B.C. Festival of Arts, setting up food service for a 500 -person camp at a Run of the River Project at Toba Inlet, hosting the B.C. Chef Education Conference in 2015, and taking many students over the years to B.C. Skills Competitions where he judged four times at the Provincial level and once at the National level. Mike has also enjoyed sponsoring the Brooks golf team since 2000.

Mike is not sure what the future holds once he retires, but he does know that he will be spending a lot of time outdoors, fishing, golfing, hiking, kayaking and riding his ATV. He just purchased an RV so he is planning on taking a few trips with his wife Clara who recently also retired.

When it comes to cooking, Mike has proven over the long haul, that he is "No Flash in the Pan." Congratulations on your well-deserved retirement, Mike!

