

## Facilitator — December 2014/January 2015



### CRFP Spotlight

Thomas Fuller

What other restaurant companies have you worked for prior to your current position?

I was a Construction Project Manager for Friendly's Ice Cream Corp. for 10 years and Senior Project Manager and Estimator for TC Construction for more than 10 years, working on Perkins and Ground Round restaurants around the country. Also, I was one of the Project Managers who helped build the U.S. Navy Periscope Manufacturing Building. At 255,000 square feet, you could put five Virginia class nuclear subs into this building.

After spending so much time in restaurants, do you cook? If so, what is your best dish?

Funny you should ask! My hobby is cooking, and I graduated with above honors from Connecticut Culinary Institute. After culinary school, I built an outdoor kitchen with a working pizza oven. My favorite item to make is my secret beans—they are the best. For any party or event, we are always asked to bring the secret beans. Some of our friends said their son hates beans, but when he had mine he ate them at the party. We left extra, and he had them for supper and a late-night snack and even ate them for breakfast, so they wanted the secret recipe, and I gave it to them.

What was your first car?

My very first car was a 1965 Ford Galaxy 500. Anyone remember those? I paid \$100 for it back in 1974, and that was a lot of money for a 17-year-old. I drove it three times before the left side of the car frame broke in half. The junkyard gave me \$50 for it. I then moved on to a Ford Pinto.

What is your all-time favorite movie?

I could watch "Air Force One" with Harrison Ford every day if my wife would let me. There's just so much action going on: I like when they take the plane over and the Secret Service is trying to get him out and land the plane.

What is the most challenging situation you've ever faced in a facility or on the job? How did you handle it?

FIRE! When I received the call, we had one of my Texas Roadhouses down and the fire was really bad. The kitchen was destroyed, and it was like cutting a limb off me. I took it to heart. My partners had no restaurant, we had more than 100 employees not working and thousands of legendary guests with no restaurant to go to. My one goal was to get there as fast as I could, take control of the job and get the restaurant re-built in a bad situation.

After working six nights and seven days, we had the local fire department break the new store opening ribbon. They were the last ones to leave seven days before with their fire hoses, so they were the first ones to come back and have dinner the proper way with our hot-off-the-grill steaks. Out of this came a lot of information on fire prevention that we have shared with other stores and has helped prevent other fires at a lot of locations.

If you weren't a restaurant facility professional, what you would be?

I would love to have a bed-and-breakfast place with my wife, Brenda, near a beach resort area. (I love to dream!) We could run it together and furnish it with all the antiques we like, and then cook the best breakfast for our guests.

What was your very first job?

I still talk about this job with others. It was very hard work, but I had the best time working there. I worked on a dairy farm taking care of 100 head of cows, feeding them and milking them at \$1.50 an hour. I knew most of the cows' names and, believe it or not, a few had different diets and I knew what they would eat. Trust me, they all had their own personality. I did that at age 15 and 16 during the summer and weekends: 5 a.m. to 7 p.m.

When I had my first son at the hospital, the nurses said, "Are you OK watching this?" I said in front of my ex-wife, "No problem; I've seen cows give birth before!" Turns out that was the wrong thing to say to a woman in pain.

What is the best advice you ever received?

The Director of Construction at Friendly's, Don Cooper, told me, "Don't ever lie to me. No matter what you have done, always tell me the truth, and I will always back you up and help you out no matter what." To this day, I live by those words with what I do, and whoever I work for, including my wife, who is the real boss.

To what would you attribute your success in achieving your CRFP? My motivation to study and attain the CRFP designation came from seeing a few others at the opening session of RFMA 2014 in Dallas getting their CRFP and recognition. When I left there, I said, "I'm going to do this and be on stage in San Diego." I want this CRFP! I even told Debi Kensell I was going to do this on the exhibit floor in the RFMA booth, because it meant something to be recognized like this in the restaurant industry.

I took the time and studied for the CRFP Prep Course online. It was so easy to understand. I took the pretest and then the final test and passed.

Would you recommend attaining a CRFP to other colleagues? Why?

Yes, very much so. My friend and coworker, Joe Murphy, saw what I did and said that I inspired him to study and take the test. Joe studied and passed the test, and he is now is a CRFP, too. He and I both agree that we learned so much from the CRFP Prep Course, and you feel like you are on cloud nine when you see that you have passed. In the end, with all the hard work and time that you put into it is well worth it. All the managing partners we work with know we have passed the CRFP and now know that we have put the time into this and deserve the recognition.

What has been the most significant change in the restaurant industry? How has it affected your job? RFMA. Specifically, attending the RFMA conference and seeing the different vendors that are out there and how much they can help us. We have four very good vendors that Texas Roadhouse now uses because of the connection at RFMA, and we are looking for more legendary partners when we attend RFMA 2015 in San Diego.

What do you do for fun in your spare time? I like to build things. My wife wanted a millstone, and we couldn't find one. Being the type of guy I am, I made her two of them.

What's the one thing most people would be surprised to learn about you? My brother-in-law, who is my lifetime hero, was a Command Master Chief for the U.S. Navy Seals. He just retired after 27 years of dedicated service to our great country and was the highest decorated combat Navy Seal after receiving the Navy Cross.

In June 2014, I helped make his retirement the best one at Seal Team 6's base command at Dam Neck, Va. John Ryan, the Director of New York Port Authority, gave my brother-in-law a cross made out of the World Trade Center steel that said, "Thank you for getting the guys that did this to us." Texas Roadhouse provided all the food for Seal Team 6 and bought them all a beer. I also made seven trays of my secret beans. Even Seal Team 6 and the admiral of the Navy Special Warfare loved them.