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Food Systems Interview

The fragrance of freshly brewed coffee beans hustled straight out the doors into the quiet and quaint town of Hillsborough, North Carolina. It found its way driven back into shelter blended with the sweet and rich aroma of a slice of fruitti di bosco. This can only be described as a typical, yet exciting morning for the Mexico City native, Attilio Salvador Luviano Navarro. The rich scent of the fruitti di bosco can be traced back into the Italian restaurant, Antonia’s, where Attilio spends 40 hours a week crafting his works of art reflecting his style and charisma.

I was able to meet with the artsy foodie at a local restaurant in downtown Hillsborough, where he was able to share his passions for food and his career. Attilio has worked in Antonia’s for 2 years and has not regretted a single day of it. He is a pastry chef in the restaurant, but limited is not a word to describe his cooking dexterity. A lot of his cooking skills and dieting lifestyle can be rooted back to his experiences working in the restaurant, including the making of pasta from scratch.

One of Attillio’s greatest influences in working in Antonia’s was his father. Attilio was independent when his father passed away due to gastric cancer. His father worked in restaurants his whole life as a manager. With the extensive exposure of the food system, he knew that he wanted to be involved in it. The departure of his father gave him a wake-up call to leave his previous job in Subway and to transition into an environment where he can better himself and learn new techniques. Upon working in Antonia’s for just a few days, he acquired more knowledge in eating healthier and a ceaseless passion for food. He noticed the differences in his diet, where growing up with his family, the diet mainly consisted of spicy, large portioned, and fried foods. Now, his diet includes more vegetables, fruits, and smaller portions.

Another influence of Attilio’s in choosing the pastry chef path roots back in his passion in graphic design. Before translating his art onto food, he was exploring and honing his skills in style and creativity in graphic design. During his senior year in high school, Attilio entered the Skills USA competition to attest for his abilities. Almost to the brink of winning, his chances were taken away due to minor technicalities. His talent was not put into waste. Attilio knew after leaving Subway that he could not only embrace, but also mold his passion of design and integrate it into food.

As an individual that crafts foods that is as pleasing to the eye as to the tastes buds, Attilio occupies an essential role in the retail and distribution sector of the food system. Attilio is an interpretive pastry chef, where similar to art, the plating of his work can be reflected on his mood. Customers can expect a delectable twist whenever they are presented with his food. He works nonstop in continuously re-inventing his style. Sometimes he gets his plating ideas from the masterpieces his roommate, a professional painter, has composed. In addition, Attilio works with fresh, local, and sustainable ingredients. The restaurant takes an initiative to purchase their fresh ingredients all within the borders of North Carolina to support local farms and fisheries. They strive to gain relationships with the local farms and to fully understand exactly where their food comes from and how they were grown. The restaurant, for example, serves dishes that showcase the “catch of the day” that can include North Carolina mahi mahi or catfish.

As a consumer in the food system, Attilio is able to provide for himself and sometimes host dinners for his friends around town. With a local market within walking distance, Attilio is able to feasibly access fresh and local foods. It’s commonplace for the locals and to visitors that products in the market can seem overpriced at first. Weaver Street Market in Hillsborough is not a common grocery store where every individual product is in a fixed price like what can be found in the large chains. In this market, the majority of the products are based on quantity. Prepackaged products can be found at varying prices. Really paying attention to it and paying what you need makes a difference, as Attilio suggested. Also, he frequents his time to the Farmer’s Market located in the downtown area. One of his favorite in-season produce to purchase is tomato. He insisted that a farmers’ market tomato would never taste better than a grocery store one. It simply cannot be beaten.



