

*In these changing times, many Americans are facing career upheavals and unexpected choices. But in this inspiring post, NOCO contributor **Annie Haarmann** tells the story of one local man who decided to take his lemons and make lemonade...*



When Reggie Taylor lost his job, he chose not to let it get him down, instead using the opportunity to pursue his lifelong dream.

“I worked for Chrysler, and when I lost my job, it was upsetting. But I took some time and the more I thought about it, the more I realized this was my chance to do something I really love,” he says. “We only get a very small window of opportunity. I knew I had to take my huge dream and somehow squeeze it into that little window.”

Growing up in the Florissant area, Taylor always loved cooking. “When I was a kid, I always watched my mother cook,” he says.

At the age of 40, after a career in corporate America, he took a leap of faith and enrolled at L’ecole Culinaire culinary arts school. When he finished training, he knew he wanted more than just a job. He wanted to share his passion with others.

As it turned out, his window of opportunity opened to the Pallottine Renewal Center, a retreat destination

in Florissant run by the Pallottine Missionary Sisters. The center was searching not just for a cook, but for a professional chef who would build on its reputation as an outstanding retreat locale.

Grown Locally, Served with Love

With Taylor on board, Pallottine is now taking a new approach to hosting retreats. Instead of serving cafeteria-style fare, they have adopted a fresh, seasonal approach to food.

“I only use the freshest vegetables, fruits and herbs – no green beans out of a can! Our guests get a superior food experience,” the new chef says. “All of my soups are handmade. I make a broccoli cheddar soup that’s better than anything you’ve tried at a café.”

Instead of serving the same fare all year long, Taylor is taking a fresh approach. “In spring and summer, I’m making my signature four-berry spring mix. I toast the pecans and make the vinaigrette by hand. I even make a mango salad dressing. I’m all about the ‘wow’ factor. The guests don’t expect the presentation to look so beautiful on the plate.”

For years, the Pallottine Missionary Sisters have tended a garden of fresh vegetables and herbs on the sprawling 80-acre property of the retreat center. “When I told them I wanted to continue to use their herbs and vegetables, they were so happy. I plan to incorporate everything they can grow into my recipes,” Taylor says.

Director Beth Moritz says the improvement has been astounding. “People have always left Pallottine retreats with a sense of renewal. And now they also leave with memories of the way the food tasted, the beautiful presentation and the phenomenal five-star service,” she says.



Sharing His Passion

Taylor is most excited about the opportunity to share what he has learned with others, so he'll be teaching children's cooking classes along with the array of kids' classes Pallottine already offers. In the meantime, he's busy serving up fresh salads, savory dishes and delightful desserts to the retreat center's guests.

"Pallottine absolutely blows my mind," Taylor says. "I just love being here, working with these people and being part of this place."

So with everything he knows about fine cuisine, what are some of Taylor's personal favorite dishes? "I'm a classic kind of eater. I love pastas with my own special cream sauce made from scratch. And you can't go wrong with my baby back ribs!"

If you'd like to try one of Chef Taylor's delicious dishes, visit the [Pallottine Renewal Center website](#) to see the upcoming retreat schedule or book an event for your organization. The center is located at 15270 Old Halls Ferry Road in Florissant.

Annie Haarmann is a writer, marketing guru and aspiring farmer who lives in Old Town Florissant and writes one very funny [blog](#). She also photographed the images for this story.