

By Dr. Iain Corness

Local Personality

Adrian O'Herlihy



The executive chef at the Amari Rincome is Adrian O'Herlihy, who with a name like that has to be an Irishman. When you talk to him, there is also no mistaking the brogue. He's Irish! The English sounding name of Adrian still fits the Irish background - his mother, a God-fearing Irish woman, named her eldest child after Pope Adrian. Begorrah!

However, our chef (not the Pope) Adrian was born in Cork and then moved to Waterford. He was a good student, strong in art, history and geography, but hated maths, algebra and Latin. When he completed his High School leaving certificate, his father, who owned a grocery store, suggested his son should become a trainee in supermarket management.

After two years of stocking the shelves and disliking it, Adrian left and gravitated to the pub, a favourite haunt of Irish folk - but this time it was to work the other side as an apprentice bartender. This was also not his lifetime's career, "To be honest with you, I couldn't get along with the manager."

The career change, despite all the wrong reasons, is the one he is still in today - cooking, going to the Dublin College of Catering to become a chef. "It was one of the best

decisions I've ever made." In a roundabout way, his father did influence this decision as well. Young Adrian used to enjoy working on the meat counter of the grocery shop and had even contemplated becoming an apprentice butcher, as long as he could work in a kitchen.

He immediately enjoyed kitchen work, though he was not quite so keen on picking and stemming sinks full of spinach. He also enjoyed the fact that being a chef was a very portable skill, and as part of his training he went overseas to work in Frankfurt in Germany. When the German night chef could not get along with the French Chef de Partie, Adrian was elevated to that position - being a gregarious Irishman had become another plus factor for his career.

Returning to the UK and having now graduated, he moved to London where he worked in an Arab hotel for seven months cooking kebabs. This seems to have left him with a lifelong hatred for kebabs as a staple diet!

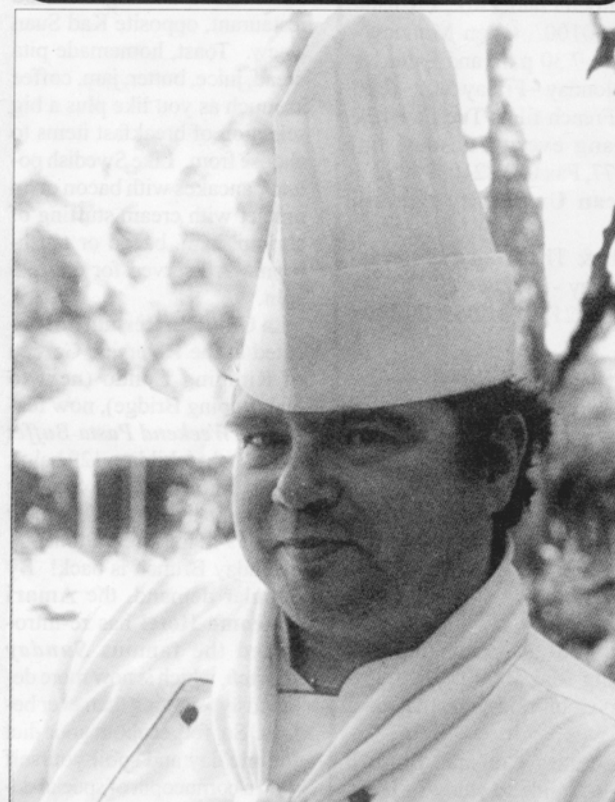
His next move (away from kebabs) was back to Germany, where a fellow Irishman had got him the next rung up the kitchen ladder to be a Commis Chef Saucier, and then it was back to the UK, to the Cumberland Hotel, the largest

in Britain, where he gained much more experience.

By now, he was really ready for overseas work and he headed for the land of promise for many Irishmen - America - and New York in particular. (It has been said unkindly that St. Patrick chased the snakes out of Ireland and they went to America and became policemen!) There he had no job waiting for him, and no green card either. But an Irishman, from the Emerald Isle itself, is the epitome of being green, and Adrian worked for a series of (yes you guessed it) - Irish restaurants as a sort of 'under the table' head chef. It was also at this time that he began to come across many Thai people working in restaurants, and became impressed with the nature of the Thais.

After a few years in New York, he gained a green card and rose through the kitchen ranks, all the way to executive chef in some of the best hotels in New York, such as the Hilton and the Four Seasons. During this time he forged another link with Thailand - he turned down an offer of work with the Dusit Thani in Bangkok, after his New York Hotel bettered their offer!

By now it had been 13 years of living in the Big



Apple and as his parents were getting on in years, Adrian decided it was time to return to Ireland, where the economy was booming and wages were very attractive.

He tried to settle in, bought himself a BMW 5 Series to indulge himself in his love of cars and driving and threw himself into developing the kitchens in some of the best

hotels in Ireland, but it was to no avail. The call of Asia was too strong and after three years he took a posting in Saudi Arabia. "Saudi was a step closer to South East Asia. I had 52 days of vacation a year and I began visiting Thailand."

The magic of the Kingdom was at work. He came and did a course in advanced Thai cooking at the Oriental in

Bangkok and kept his ear to the ground, looking for work in Thailand. He did not have to wait too long and when kitchen opportunities arose in the Amari group he applied. Eventually it was a toss-up between Pattaya and Chiang Mai. "It was a tough decision, but people told me Chiang Mai was nice and the people were too, so I came up and saw Chiang Mai and I liked it."

In the short time he has been here, he has already begun to make his mark, not only in the kitchens, but has rapidly gained acceptance in the expat community. He does look upon Thailand as the long haul and wants to settle down here. To this end he is taking Thai lessons three times a week - and buying another BMW.

Chiang Mai diners will enjoy this creative chef, who just loves his job. "Eighty percent of the stuff I serve is my own," he said enthusiastically, also saying, "It's not a job. It's a vocation. You shouldn't be in it if you're not prepared to work the hours!" He is single, the hours stopping marriage plans in 1991, "She wasn't in the industry. My career came first. If someone does come along now, she'd have to be pretty special!" The words of a man already married - to his kitchen stove. Girls, you have been warned!