

Government Food Service

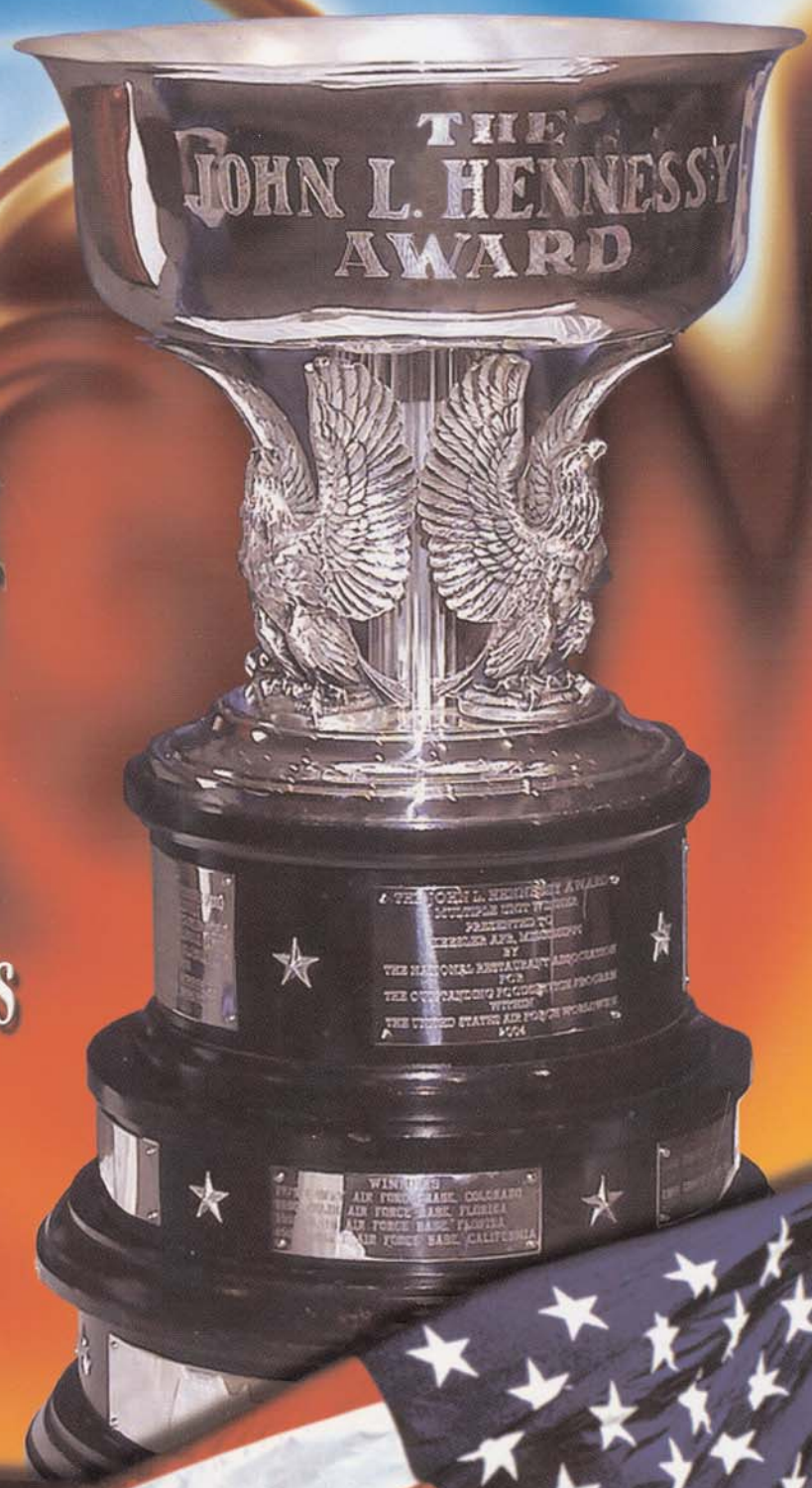
an ebm publication

MAY 2006



Air Force
Hennessy Awards

50th
Anniversary



THE JOHN L. HENNESSY AWARD
ESTABLISHED 1956
PRESENTED BY
LESTER AFB, MISSOURI
BY
THE NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION
FOR
THE OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE PROGRAM
OF
THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
1956

WINNERS
1956-1957 AIR FORCE BASE, COLORADO
1957-1958 AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA
1958-1959 AIR FORCE BASE, TEXAS
1959-1960 AIR FORCE BASE, CALIFORNIA

The Past, Present and Future of Air Force Food Service

The Air Force celebrates 50 years of the John L. Hennessy excellence in food service award.

This photograph shows an original Hennessy trophy, which members of the Hennessy Travelers Association are hoping to locate and display at the 50th anniversary celebration.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE HENNESSY TRAVELERS ASSOC.

On May 19 and 20, representatives from Air Force Food Service, the National Restaurant Association (NRA) and many other professional organizations, food companies and personnel from the other branches of service will get together in Chicago, Ill., to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Air Force John L. Hennessy Award as well as the 2006 winners. While the five winners for this year will certainly take center stage, this year's event features the theme "The Past, the Present and the Future," and will include events honoring the founders, supporters and winners of the Hennessy Award from the program's creation in 1956 until today.

IN THE BEGINNING

Not only does 2006 mark the 50th anniversary of the Hennessy Award, but it is the 50th anniversary of military foodservice awards in general, as the Air Force was the first to implement a foodservice awards program.

The Hennessy program was part of the Hoover Commission, which was established by President Eisenhower to study ways to improve the efficiency of government agencies. "With the Hoover Commission they were looking at military food service across the board, and they thought a competition within the services would be a good thing to improve the program of the military services," said George Miller, chief of Air Force Food Service. "One individual on the Hoover Commission was Mr. John L. Hennessy."

In 1957, the Hennessy Awards ceremony was held at the Palmer House in Chicago, Ill.

John L. Hennessy began his career in hotels as a freight elevator operator, but then worked his way up to become vice president of Statler Hotels in 1928 and chairman of the board before World War II. When Statler Hotels was taken over by the Hilton Hotels Corp., he became vice president of Hilton, the largest hotel corporation in the world at that time. He also served as chairman of the War Food Committee in 1943, special food consultant to the Secretary of War and a member of the Restaurant Advisory



Commission, among others positions, leading up to his appointment to the Hoover Commission. It was Hennessy who made the recommendation that military services adopt a foodservice competition program to help inspire better management and command support of food service.

"He set this program, this idea into motion, to [create] an awards program because he knew how competitive the military was," said Carmen Vacalebri, president of the Hennessy Travelers Association (HTA). "It was because of his doing that the program was instituted, and unfortunately he never saw it come to fruition. He passed away before the awards program was named after him or fully implemented."

"Of all the awards we have in the Air Force, this is the oldest," according to Miller. "It's also the only award [for which] civilians come out and evaluate our facilities — civilians in the industry from the NRA, IFSEA [International Food Services Association] and SFM [Society for Foodservice Management] — it's the only award in food that is done that way across the board. The program itself, since its inception, has improved our dining facilities to be the best in the Department of Defense (DoD), and we can prove that if you ask us to. Come see the facilities and measure ours against others! When you walk into ours it's like you're eating in a downtown restaurant, fine dining."

—Continued

2006 Winners

The following are the 2006 winners of the U.S. Air Force John L. Hennessy award for excellence in food service.

Single-Facility Category

Travis AFB, Calif.

Multiple-Facility Category

Eglin AFB, Fla.

Air Force Reserve Command

911 Services Flight, Pittsburgh AFS, Pa.

Air National Guard

120 Services Flight, Great Falls, Mont.

USAFE Food Service Small Site Award

701 Munitions Support Squadron, Kleine Brogel, Belgium



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Hennessy Awards



Team members from Charleston AFB, S.C., in 1957 pose with the trophy they were presented with that year.

FOODSERVICE FRATERNITY

The Hennessy Travelers Association is a group with the sole purpose of organizing events to honor Hennessy Award winners and those who travel around the world, evaluating installations competing for the award. "It's become sort of like a fraternity," said Vacalebri. "[During] the early years of the Hennessy program, the Hennessy Travelers Association was just a bunch of guys and girls getting

together and meeting once a year just to discuss their travels and talk about goings-on in the military. [Now,] we meet annually and we have elected officers and we develop scholarship programs. That is something near and dear to our hearts right now."

In the beginning, Vacalebri had no idea what he was becoming a part of. "I was a traveler for the NRA in 2003," he said. "I traveled to eight air bases, and I was the multiunit evaluator. ... I spent a week in Texas, a week in California, a week in South Korea, a week in Florida, [then traveling to] England, and then a week in Germany. It was a five-week tour and I was amazed and enthralled with the caliber of people in the food service and also in the military, of course. Having not ever served in the military, which I always wanted to do but I just didn't have the opportunity to do it, I was amazed at the goings-on on a daily basis and the cleanliness and the operations of these air base dining facilities.

"I met a lot of great people," he continued. "Four-star generals and colonels and cooks and dishwashers — great people to bond with, which I did do. It was a lot of fun. It was serious business — but we had a fun side to it, too. Also, the other evaluators that I was with

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— the two military personnel and my counterpart, a fellow from IFSEA, he was the other civilian.” However, Vacalebri was the only member of the team who had never served in the service at any time. “So that is how I got involved, and I went to a HTA alumni meeting and after I told my story and that I enjoyed it so much, we had nominations for president and I was nominated for president of the association.” Not only did he win that year, but he has been president ever since.

In addition to the events and support of the program, the HTA is working on building a scholarship program as a way to send top food-service specialists to culinary programs at schools like the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) or Johnson & Wales. “We’re trying to put together a program to send 50 airmen to spend one week at the CIA in California,” Vacalebri said. “Our fundraising efforts for the scholarship program have not really come to fruition, but a scholarship pro-



Some of the 2006 Hennessy program evaluators pose with a sign honoring 50 years of Air Force Food Service at F.E. Warren AFB, Wyo.

gram is something that we can consider after the May 19th [awards ceremony], which would be the date that we would have those 50 airmen coming to Chicago to receive their scholarships.

—Continued

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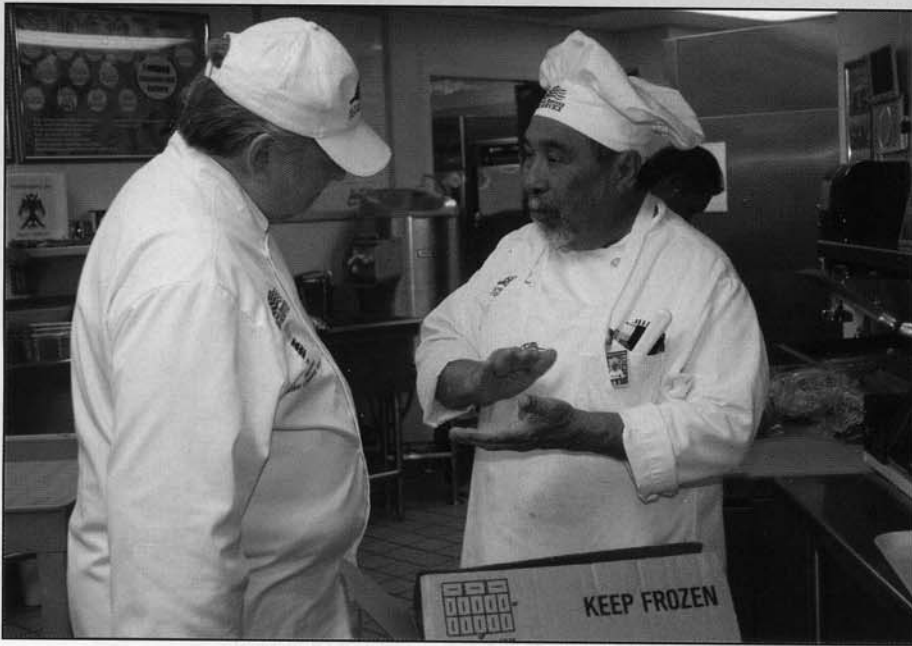
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"Right now we are focusing in on the scholarships," he continued. "We're looking for commitments from individuals and from companies for [sponsorship for the] scholarship program. If not 50,

we'd like to send 10 or 20 airmen to the Culinary Institute [of America] or Johnson & Wales, or to any program that would enhance their curriculum in the foodservice industry." Recipients of the scholarship



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this year will attend the Culinary Institute of America in St. Helena, Calif., in February of 2007, or receive a "gift certificate" to attend at another time if there is a scheduling conflict.

—Continued

Members of the National Restaurant Association (NRA), the International Food Service Executives Association (IFSEA) and the Society for Foodservice Management (SFM) often serve as evaluators for the Hennessy Program. Industry experts from both civilian and military foodservice organizations travel around the world to inspect dining facilities as part of the program process.

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THE CELEBRATION

"The focus of the 50th celebration is the past, the present and future," Vacalebri said. "The past is to recognize a lot of the Hennessy Travelers and the bases that have won the Hennessy Award through the last 50 years." He anticipates a "huge" event on Friday, May 19, at a cocktail reception from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Chicago Hilton. "We're expecting 400-450 people to attend this event, and it'll be a celebration of the past, with audiovisual [equipment displaying] photos of different bases that people went to and different pictures and trophies. We're in the third generation of the Hennessy trophy, and we're going to show the first Hennessy trophy that was given out." While as of press time the HTA had only photos of the original trophy, attempts were still being made to locate one. The second and current incarnations will be on display at the reception. "We're going to have a speaking program and recognize a lot of folks that will be attending this event, including our sponsors, and trying to solicit donations for the scholarship program."

The NRA has really taken a lead role in planning the event, according to Valacalbre, in conjunction with the Air Force personnel involved in the Hennessy Program. "They usually do a cocktail reception, and we've added an extra hour onto the tail end of their reception to add a speaking program," he said. "We're

going to recognize the 2006 winners of the Hennessy trophy and present the HTA award." The HTA Award of Excellence is presented to one person each year who demonstrates dedication to food service and an interest in pursuing a career in the culinary field after his or her tour of duty is over, and that person is also presented with a scholarship. The winner is kept secret until the actual presentation.

"Our logo is 'From stainless steel trays to fine china,'" Miller noted. "That is our theme for the Hennessy Program this year. We used to feed people on steel trays, so from steel trays to fine china — that is how far we have moved. People from past travelers to the present ones have moved us through that process."

The Hennessy Program today has proven to be very beneficial and influential in Air Force feeding. "[As a result of] of the Hennessy Program and the food cost and some other factors, we went to a la carte dining," Miller said. "We are the only service that is full-blown a la carte now, and we have been since the early 1970s. In addition, some of the structure in the way our dining facilities are built, and some of the concepts that we have implemented, are the result of the Hennessy process. The industry [evaluators] give us these ideas and they help us to see exactly what it is we need to do."

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LOOKING AHEAD

When it comes to the future of Air Force Food Service, the main goal right now is to continue with the implementation of branding initiatives, such as the one already in place for salad dressing, coffee and fish products, as well as continuing to work on and adjust the program, making changes as needed. In addition, new dining facilities are being constructed, and some others renovated, many incorporating ideas and concepts that were suggested by Hennessy Program evaluators — industry experts from around the country. As for the Hennessy Program itself, there are no changes planned for the immediate future.

“Looking at what has gone on in the past and what it looks like we are going to in the future, we are going to stay with the same kind of evaluation process,” Miller said. “The thing that makes the evaluation process good is the civilian travelers that come with us from industry. ... They can look at different ways of saving dollars and streamlining the concepts and those types of things. I look at that as a continuing thing — benchmarking with them, partnering with them to offer our program, move our program way ahead.”

As for the HTA, its main goal for the future is the development of the scholarship program and obtaining sponsors to help it come to fruition. While the association currently has a partnership with Otis Spunkmeyer to fund one of its scholarships, this new goal of sending 50 airmen or women for culinary training each year is taking its program above and beyond the next level.

—GFS

“Of all the awards we
have in the Air Force,
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It’s also the only award
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—George Miller, chief of Air Force Food Service

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