

Ethnic Gem: Gerry Fernandez

Prepresident and Founder Multicultural Foodservice and Hospitality Alliance.

Rhode Island

Lesley White-Buefort, Contributing Writer



Gerry Fernandez is truly a New Englander. Although he has lived in New York City and Minneapolis, he has returned time and again to New England, criss-crossing this territory. Born in Hanson, MA, Gerald lived in Vermont for a brief time, and in 2001, he made his fifth and final move back to Rhode Island.

Gerry Fernandez is a foodservice professional. Like many people in hospitality and culinary professions, he did not choose the restaurant industry; it chose him. After several jobs where he experienced working with the public, and after a nudge from a teacher, he enrolled in **Johnson & Wales University's Culinary Arts Program**. The industry captured his heart and so began his career. He opened Hemenway's Seafood Grill & Oyster Bar in Providence in 1985 and has held leadership positions at landmark establishments such as the **Waldorf Astoria Hotel and Capital Grille**. He lists some "movers and shakers" in the restaurant business as his mentors. Pat Harris, current Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer for

McDonald's Corporation, and Julia Stewart, CEO of DineEquity, the parent company of Applebee's and IHOP, are two individuals he credits with helping him develop his career thus far.

Gerry Fernandez is an activist. In 1996, while employed by General Mills, Gerry founded The Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance (MHFA) and currently serves as the organization's president. The organization is a respected non-profit focused on promoting the business benefits of cultural diversity in the food and hospitality industry. One of its goals is to assist member companies with attracting, developing, and retaining culturally diverse employees. Among his other affiliations, he is a member of the **NAACP, the National Council of La Raza, the Women's Foodservice Forum, The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), and Meeting Professionals International (MPI)**. Gerald is a trustee of Johnson & Wales University and serves on the board of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank. One has to wonder when he finds time to sleep!

Gerry Fernandez is TRULY an Ethnic Gem! His level of community involvement is exemplary and his peers have recognized his professional achievement. In 1998, Restaurant Hospitality magazine named him a "Rising Star." In 1999, his alma mater conferred upon him an honorary doctorate in Business Administration and he received the National Job Corps Association's "Alpha Award." In January of 2000, Fernandez was named one of Nation's Restaurant News's "50 Power Players" and in August 2001, he was recognized by Lodging Magazine as one of the 75 Profiles in Leadership. Gerry Fernandez holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Foodservice Management from Johnson & Wales University where he also earned a Culinary Arts degree in 1976. Gerry is married, has three sons and six grandchildren; he lives with his wife, Debra, in Warwick, Rhode Island.




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