



## Year of the Chef

How many of us are fascinated by the Chinese Zodiac Calendar that is placed squarely in front of us at most Chinese Restaurants? The year 2014 marks the year of the (wood) horse, which according to that calendar determines a person's personality traits, compatibility, and his/her good (or bad) fortune. Taking up the same framework, Steepletown is establishing this year as the Year of the Chef. And to those who have the fortune of being born this year, in the likeness of **Chef Tommy FitzGerald of Kitchen Sage**, they are likely to be "hugely loud-mouthed, highly civic-minded", possessing the ability to see success where others see failure.



Over this past year Steepletown and Tommy FitzGerald, Founder and Executive Director of Kitchen Sage, have found that they have a lot in common. Both share an affinity to work with some of the most challenged young adults in our community; both possess some unique and innovative ways to connect with such young adults; and both see these young adults as a success in the making, not failures who will later become just another statistic.

This past summer Steepletown partnered with Chef Tommy to take its summer youth employment training to another level. Rather than handing a kid a broom for the summer, the goal was to provide these young adults the training and opportunity to earn a nationally recognized credential that will lead to further employment opportunities. Chef Tommy worked with 12 youth/young adults and a new recipe for success was created. Space is far too limited here to report on the details, so please check out Chef Tommy's website at [www.kitchensage.com](http://www.kitchensage.com).

The stage, or in this case "the table", is now set to provide a most amazing venue that will bring together academic, leadership, and culinary arts training. The Culinary Leadership Academy will soon begin the next phase of its work, with the goal of giving young adults the space to complete their academic credentials (GED preparation with Steepletown), acquire basic culinary skills, and prepare for a real world hospitality work ethic. From the start of each session, these young adults will be working on their ServSafe certification along with the basics of Service that Sells.

For Steepletown this is one area where the "Year of the Chef" will be very obvious. Another example is what took place on September 26<sup>th</sup> at Steepletown's Chip In For Kids golf outing- they were treated to



the most amazing lunch (see picture above) by Chef Tommy. He is also providing the breakfast, lunch and snacks for the kids in the Steepletown Preschool, so gone are the days of a sandwich and carrot sticks EVERY day! Even our staff stop over for lunch on occasion in the hope of finding some leftovers. And there will be other fun and exciting things happening this year with Chef Tommy and Kitchen Sage as a partner of Steepletown. So stay tuned and enjoy the Year of the Chef!

### Tommy's Quotes from the GR Business Journal, September 26, 2014

*"These kids are opportunists. They come from many demographics, but they want the opportunity to learn not only to cook but also to be a better person. I really hate it when people say 'disadvantaged.' They're not disadvantaged. They're seizing a legitimate opportunity for themselves."*

*The world owes us nothing," he said. "We owe the world. We're here to make the world better. All we've got is each other on this planet. We either are going to teach these kids to be part of the community and give them the tools to build on, or we'll create more dependence."*

To read the entire article, please copy and paste this link into your browser. <http://bit.ly/1sydtyk>



## WACC Room – “What’s THAT all about?”

The Wrap-Around Care Center, playfully known as the “WACC Room”, is a service offered to Steepletown Preschool students and the children of active GED students that provides child care during the afternoon hours. In response to the need for convenient, affordable, quality child care at the end of the school day, the WACC room was created. This has been a big help for parents who are working or have



other commitments and are unable to pick up their child at 3:00p.m. This room also allows Steepletown to address a perennial issue, i.e. childcare, that often is a barrier to those with children who want to complete their GED.

The two staff members who operate the WACC room are Nellie Fuentes and Donte Castleberry. Both were hired because of their interest to work in early childhood education & care. Both are going to be returning to school to earn their Child Development Accreditation certification this upcoming January, which will be paid for through the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative. Donte is motivated by the opportunity to “help get a life on the right track”, as he values being a positive male role model for children in the preschool who are reaching beyond the familiarity of their homes for the first time. Nellie is actually a neighbor who had a summer paid work experience through Steepletown when she was only 14, working at the South West Area Neighbors. Over 10 years later she is back living in the neighborhood and came to see how she could reconnect to Steepletown. Working at the preschool and WACC room is a great fit!

The WACC room is open from 3:00pm to 6:00pm, Monday through Thursday, and is located just a few steps from our Preschool classrooms. Help Steepletown meet the needs of our community members by supporting the growth of this room. Please contact Erika Purcell-Williams, Program Director, with questions at (616) 451-4215 ext. 116.

## GRPS Graduation Rate Hits 100%!

Maybe not any time soon, but this is a goal of many conversations and efforts in Grand Rapids. Last year 32% of Kent County students did not graduate with their class; for GRPS the number is even higher. In response, one of the “big, audacious goals” of the United Way is to increase the percentage of students



graduating on time. This is a critical goal, because some estimate the social costs and lifetime earnings loss for those who do not complete high school to be as high as one million dollars.

Steepletown was recently invited by the RDV Corporation to be part of an initiative that will hopefully make a difference as well. B2B Project LIFT, previously known as the Neighborhood Engagement Parent Investment Model (NE/PIM) is an intensive information service that links families together with pertinent academic-related information increasing the investment of academic support to students and increasing students' academic effort in the classroom. By providing parents with timely data on a weekly basis through phone calls, text messages, and home visits, parents are empowered with the data needed to support their child's academic success. B2B's Project LIFT is designed to be a collaborative effort between Believe 2 Become, Neighborhood Engagement Partners and Grand Rapids Public Schools.



Miguel Abreu serves as the Project LIFT Coordinator for Steepletown. For the past four years he has worked with GRPS as a Youth Advocate, working with students who were struggling with their attendance, academic performance, and/or behavior. This required him to also have extensive contact with the families of these students. Prior to that he worked at the United Methodist Community House, coordinating their after school programs for youth. Miguel is also a trainer for Proud Fathers and Healthy Marriages/Healthy Relationships. . His hope as the LIFT Coordinator is to get parents involved in their child's education by gaining the knowledge and tools needed to support their child's success both in high school and beyond.